BATTLES ROYAL DOWN NORTH

By NORMAN DUNCAN

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BATTLES ROYAL DOWN NORTH

WORKS OF NORMAN DUNCAN

The Soul of the Street
The Way of the Sea
Doctor Luke of the Labrador
The Mother
Doctor Grenfell's Parish
The Adventures of Billy Topsail
The Cruise of the Shining Light
Every Man for Himself
The Suitable Child
Going Down from Jerusalem
Higgins: A Man's Christian
Billy Topsail and Company
The Measure of a Man
The Best of a Bad Job
Finding His Soul
The Bird Store Man
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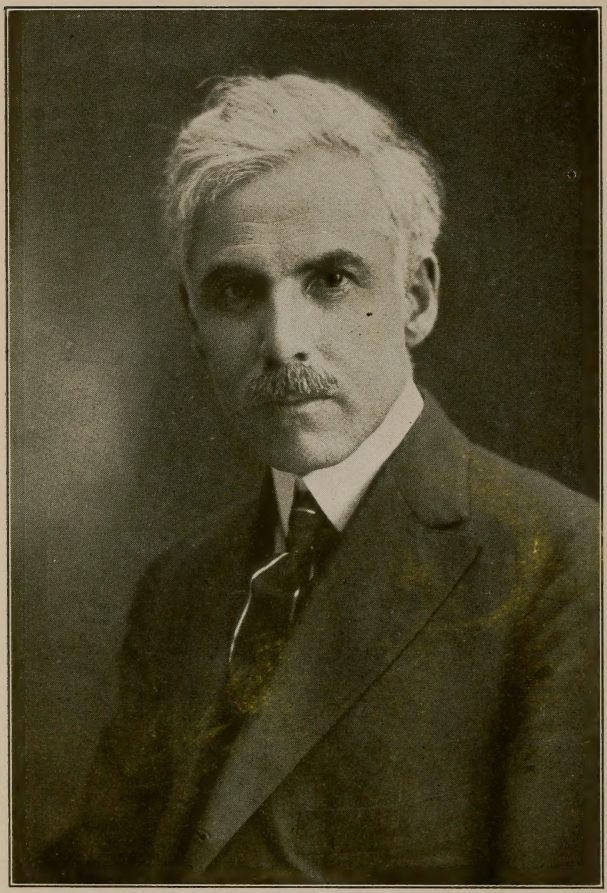

1871 1916

Norman Duncan

BATTLES ROYAL DOWN NORTH

BY

NORMAN DUNCAN

AUTHOR OF

"DOCTOR LUKE OF THE LABRADOR," etc.

With an Appreciation by
WILFRED T. GRENFELL, M.D.

ILLUSTRATED

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NORMAN DUNCAN

An Appreciation by

Wilfred T. Grenfell, M. D.

As our thoughts fly back to the days when the writer of these stories was a guest aboard our little hospital vessel, we remember realizing how vast was the gulf which seemed to lie between him and the circumstances of our sea life in the Northland. Nowhere else in the world, perhaps, do the cold facts of life call for a more unrelieved material response. It is said of our people that they are born with a netting needle in their hand and an ax by the side of their cradle. Existence is a daily struggle with adamantine facts and conditions; and quick, practical response, which leaves little encouragement or opportunity for dreamers, is, often enough, the only dividing line between life and death. As I write these lines the greatest physical battle the world has ever seen is being fought. Yet here, as my eyes wander over the great ocean around me, nothing but absolute peace meets my view. But it too has its stormy times and its days when its strength and its mighty depths of possibilities are the most insistent points about it. And this spirit

of the deep Norman Duncan seems to have understood as did no other of our visitors.

Our experience of the men from the hubs of existence had led us to regard them all as hardened by a keener struggle than ours, and critical, if not suspicious, of those who were satisfied to endure greater physical toil and discomfort than they for so much smaller material return. In the Labrador even a dog hates to be laughed at, and the merest suspicion of the supercilious makes a gap which it is almost impossible to bridge. But Norman Duncan created no such gap. He was, therefore, an anomaly to us—he was away below the surface—and few of us, during the few weeks he stayed, got to know him well enough to appreciate his real worth. Yet men who "go down to the sea in ships" have before now been known to sleep through a Grand Opera, or to see little to attract in the works of the Old Masters. And so we gather comfort for our inability to measure this man at his full stature.

All who love men of tender, responsive imagination loved Duncan. It was quite characteristic of the man that though he earned large sums of money by his pen, he was always so generous in helping those in need—more especially those who showed talents to which they were unable, through stress of circumstances, to give expression—that he died practically a poor man. He was a high-souled, generous idealist. All his work is purposeful, con-

veying to his readers a moral lesson. He had the keenest appreciation of the feelings of others and understood the immense significance of the little things of life—a fact evidenced by his vivid descriptions of the beauties of Nature, which he first appreciated and then, with his mastery of English, so ably described. His own experience of poverty and struggle after leaving the university opened to him channels for his sympathetic portrayal of humble life. Physically he was never a fighter or an athlete; but he proved himself possessed of singular personal courage. He fought his best fights, however, on fields to which gladiators have no entry and in battles which, unlike our physical contests, are not spasmodic, but increasing and eternal. Norman Duncan's love and affection for the people whom we also found joy in serving naturally endeared him to us. He was ever a true knight, entering the lists in behalf of those principles which make up man's real inner life; and we realize that his love for men who embody characteristics developed by constant contact with the sea—fortitude, simplicity, hardiness—died only with his own passing.

The stories here brought together are woven out of experiences gathered during his brief periods of contact with our life. But how real are his characters! Like other famous personalities in fiction —Mr. Pickwick, Ebenezer Scrooge, Colonel Newcome, Tom Jones, and a thousand others—who

people a world we love, they teach us, possibly, more of high ideals, and of our capacities for service than do the actual lives of some saints, or the biographies of philosophers. And how vivid the action in which his characters take part! In the external circumstances of his life and in his literary art and preferences he was singularly like his elder brother in romance, Robert Louis Stevenson. Both were slight in physique but manly and vigorous in character and mission in life. Both were wanderers over the face of the globe. Both loved the sea passionately, and were at their best in telling of the adventures of those who spend their lives on the great waters. Both, finally, died at the height of power, literally with pen in hand, for both left recent and unfinished work. And the epitaph of either might well be the noble words of Stevenson from his brave essay on the greatness of the stout heart bound with triple brass:

"Death has not been suffered to take so much as an illusion from his heart. In the hot-fit of life, a-tiptoe on the highest point of being, he passes at a bound on the other side. The noise of the mallet and chisel is scarcely quenched, the trumpets are hardly done blowing, when, trailing clouds of glory, this happy-starred, full-blooded spirit shoots into the spiritual land."

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

IN the blood of Norman Duncan lived a spirit of romance and a love of adventure which make the chronicle of his short life a record of change and movement. He was born in Brantford, on the Grand River, in Western Ontario, July 2, 1871, and though he passed most of the years of his manhood in the United States, he never took out citizenship papers in the Republic. After a boyhood spent in various towns in Canada, he entered Toronto University, where in his four years of undergraduate life he participated eagerly in all forms of social and literary activity.

In 1895 he joined the reportorial staff of the *Auburn* (N. Y.) *Bulletin,* which position he held for two years. Then followed four years of congenial work on the staff of the *New York Evening Post,* where he served successively as reporter, copy editor on city desk, special writer for the city, and, finally, editor of the Saturday supplement. The editors of the *Post* were quick to recognize Duncan's ability in descriptive writing and character delineation, and under the spur of their encouragement he did his first important literary work, a series of short-stories of life in the Syrian quarter of New York City, published first

in *The Atlantic Monthly* and *McClure's Magazine* and gathered subsequently into a book entitled *The Soul of the Street.* About the time of the appearance of this book the author's temperament reacted against the atmosphere which it embodied, and in the summer of 1900 by an arrangement with *McClure's Magazine* he went to Newfoundland to gather impressions and material for a series of sea-tales. Up to this time he had never spent a night on the ocean nor been at sea on a sailing vessel; in his boyhood he had rather feared the great gray ocean, and only later in life did he become so strongly attracted by its power and mystery and by the impression of its eternal struggle against those who must wrest a precarious living from its depths that it provided the background for his most striking and characteristic stories. Three summers in Newfoundland and one on the Labrador Coast resulted in *The Way of the Sea, Doctor Luke of the Labrador,* and other books and short-stories, including those of the present collection.

In 1901 Duncan was appointed assistant to the professor of English at Washington and Jefferson College, and one year later he was elected Wallace Professor of Rhetoric at the same institution, a post which he held until 1906. His duties were comparatively light so that he was able to devote much of his time to literary work. While occupying this position he enjoyed the companionship of

his brother, Robert Kennedy Duncan, Professor of Chemistry at the college and later President of the Mellon Institute of the University of Pittsburgh, and the prominent author of a well-known series of text books in chemistry, who died in 1914.

In 1907 and 1908 Norman Duncan was special correspondent for *Harper's Magazine* in Palestine, Arabia, and Egypt, and in 1912 and 1913 he was sent by the same magazine to Australia, New Guinea, the Dutch East Indies, and the Malay States. Between these travel periods he acted for two years as adjunct professor of English at the University of Kansas. Not any of Duncan's foreign travel seems to have impressed him as did his visits to Newfoundland and the Labrador coast, and some of his best tales are those of the Northland—powerful stories of life reduced to its elements. Of these tales those of the present collection are a good representation.

The creator of these great stories was cut off at the height of his power; he died very suddenly of heart-disease while playing a golf-match in Fredonia, New York, on October 18, 1916. He lies buried in Brantford, Ontario, the town of his birth.

Few modern writers of tales and short-stories have drawn their materials from sources as scattered as those which attracted Norman Duncan. Among the immigrants of the East Side of New York, the rough lumber-jacks of the Northwest, and the trappers and deep-sea fishermen of New-

foundland and The Labrador he gathered his ideas and impressions. But though his characters and incidents are chosen from such diverse sources, the characteristics of his literary art remain constant in all his books, for the personality of the author did not change.

Norman Duncan was a realist in that he copied life. But his realism is that of Dickens and Bret Harte and Kipling rather than that of Mrs. Freeman and Arthur Morrison and the Russian story-tellers. He cared less for the accuracy of details than for the vividness of his general impressions and the force of his moral lessons. Like Bret Harte he idealized life. Like Harte, too, he was fond of dramatic situations and striking contrasts, of mixing the bitter and the sweet and the rough and the smooth of life; his introduction of the innocent baby into the drunkard-filled bar-room in *The Measure of a Man* is strikingly like Bret Harte's similar employment of this sentimental device in *The Luck of Roaring Camp,* and the presence of Patty Batch among the soiled women of Swamp's End in the same tale and of the tawdry Millie Slade face to face with the curate in *The Mother* is again reminiscent of Harte's technique. Like Dickens and like Bret Harte, Duncan was a frank moralist. His chief concern was in winnowing the souls of men and women bare of the chaff of petty circumstances which covered them. His stories all contain at least a minor chord of sentiment, but

are usually free from the sentimentality which mars some of Harte's sketches. He is not ashamed to employ pathos, but his tragic situations are rarely overstrained and maudlin. He has all the tenderness of Dickens; his *Christmas Eve at Topmast Tickle* may well be compared with *A Christmas Carol.* Norman Duncan never married, but few Canadian or American authors have understood women as did the creator of high-spirited Bessie Roth and her noble mother in *Doctor Luke of the Labrador,* of naïve little Patty Batch, and of Millie Slade, glorified by her love for her son. In the delicacy and sensibility of his delineation of women he undoubtedly surpasses Bret Harte, most of whose women are either exaggerated or colorless. Moreover, Norman Duncan possessed a very genuine understanding of children, particularly of young boys, of whom he was exceedingly fond. There are few more sympathetic pictures of children in American literature than those of David Roth and the Lovejoy twins in *Doctor Luke of the Labrador,* and of Donald, Pale Peter's lad, in *The Measure of a Man;* and in Billy Topsail Duncan has created a real boy, a youngster as red-blooded and manly and keen for excitement in his numerous thrilling adventures in the frozen North as are any of Stevenson's boy heroes.

Variety and color in characters and situations, vividness of descriptions—especially in those of the stormy sea—rapidity of movement and dramatic

intensity in narratives, genuine sentiment and real tenderness, humor, and pathos, and, above all, a healthy, vigorous, Anglo-Saxon morality—all of these qualities make of Norman Duncan's books and short-stories literature that is distinctly worthy and permanent in character.

I

THE ROSE OF GREAT PRICE

I

OLD MEN OF THE SEA

LINGER TICKLE was warm that day. It was Indian Summer. A sweet haze—the drift of a far-away wilderness fire—flushed the sun and deepened the yellow color of the world to ochre. Between the ochre sunlight and purple shadows of the Linger Tickle hills, the harbor water lay flat and black; and beyond the heads of harbor—past Split Tooth and the Second Sister—the sea rolled lazy and gray over the Hook-an'-Line grounds and listlessly splashed the drab rocks of the coast. From Linger Tickle the road scrambled over the hills of Little Jolly Island to the seaward cliffs where the whitewashed cottages of the folk of Tell-Tale gripped the rock, in the eternal shadow of the great cleft of Black Droch. Climbing from the road to Tell-Tale, that mellow Newfoundland afternoon, and having come, at last, to the grassy middle slopes of The Lookout, old Davy Lunt paused to wheeze the high air and ease his incompetent back. An ominous month of inflammatory rheumatism on The Labrador—he was

used to referring lightly to the bitter agony of that time as "a li'l' twist o' th' rheumaticks"—had closed all those wet harbors against his return; and the questionable behavior of two lean legs had at last abandoned him for good and all to a surfeit of ease ashore. Rest from the long task was now grateful to the old bones and wheezing lungs of him.

Hove to, then, on the grassy slope of The Look-out, midway of the day's cruise, with the crest of the great Head yet to achieve, Davy Lunt looked back over the spruce and alder and bald rock of the hills below. It had been a hard climb: he was tired. Fifty sealing seasons at the ice in the spring of the year, and the winds of fifty years of mid-summer Labrador fishing, had blistered his eyes and spoiled his hearing. No detail of the little sweep of world below was defined: it was all a mist of green and yellow and black to which memory gave sufficiently the form and incident of its contents. Nothing heroic engaged his reflection as he looked back—no incident of the Red Sou'-wester of the spring of the Year of Off-Shore Weather; nor of the wreck of the *Never Say Die* in the shoal water of Come-Close-an'-Be-Cotched — eighteen hours on a smothered reef; nor of the cruise of the *First Man Home*—beating up from the Hen-an'-Chickens in black Fall weather, leaking like a basket, decks awash with a load of green cod, and the crew whimpering to Skipper Davy for mercy

and harbor. His meditations ignored those famous exploits: they took, rather, a sentimental direction —the direction of the graveyard, which lay in a fertile, sunlit hollow, back of the naked flank of The Jumping Jack.

On the crest of The Lookout—the edge of the high cliff above the sea—Davy Lunt fell in with old Uncle Jimmie Horn.

"What you doin' with that big book you got?" Davy inquired.

"This here book I got in my hands?"

"'Tis a book, isn't she?"

"She's a book, Davy. She sure is! That's jus' what she is."

"What you doin' with a book?"

"I'm pretty near readin' it."

"What say? Readin' it?"

"Me? No. I been *pretty near* readin' it. I can't read nothin' but some portions o' the Holy Scriptures. My mother teached me the Twenty-third Psalm an' the Thirteenth Chapter o' First Corinthians by rote. I reads un free an' easy t' this day. What I knows by rote I reads well enough with my new spectacles. I isn't been readin' this here big book. I jus' come *pretty near* readin' it. I been lookin' at the pictures."

"Flowers, Jimmie?"

"Ay, b'y," Uncle Jimmie replied gravely. "You got it right, Skipper Davy." He pursed his lips. There was a trace of the pomposity of scholarship

in his tone. "This here big book is about flowers. She tells about seeds an' shoots," he explained. "She tells what t' pay an' where t' send. 'Tis what they calls a catalogue. She come up from St. John's two year ago. I'm read to regular out of her. My fifth gran'son is a bit of a scholar, Skipper Davy. He've reached the age o' twelve an' page one-fifty-three this year. I 'low he'll master this here big book afore he's thirteen. Jus' now I been overhaulin' the chapter about——"

"Roses, Skipper Jimmie?"

"Ay, roses!"

Skipper Davy chuckled a little. It was not a bantering amusement. There was melancholy in it —the smiling melancholy of a long retrospect.

"You been wonderful fond o' roses all your life," said he. "I mind the li'l' rosebush you kep' aboard the *Pussy Willow* the year us fished at Soap-an'-Water."

"You're dodderin', b'y! 'Twasn't a rosebush I kep' in the forecas'l' at Soap-an'-Water. 'Twas a tulip."

"What say? Two roses, Jimmie?"

"Hut!" Jimmie snapped. "'Twas a red tulip, shaped like a goblet." Jimmie's voice fell plaintive. "Don't you mind that lovely li'l' red tulip I kep' at Soap-an'-Water?"

Davy nodded.

"Frost bit her," said he, "in northerly weather down at Tickle-t'-Harbor."

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

"Ah, no, Davy!"

"Frost bit her. I minds——"

"Frost didn't touch her."

"I minds well that the frost bit her at Tickle-t'-Harbor the night that——"

"No!" Uncle Jimmie complained. "You're nothin' but a dodderin' ol' codger, Davy! 'Twas beatin' out o' Hungry Harbor I lost my tulip. A slappin' big sea carried her away when us struck the open off Jelly Cake Head. Don't you mind, Davy?—me near goin' over the side after that li'l' red tulip?"

"You kep' a rose," Davy insisted firmly, "at Lady Cove."

"Lady Cove!" Jimmie expostulated. "At Lady Cove I kep' a fuchsia from my mother's window-shelf. Your mind is sure givin' way, Davy. You don't mind nothin' at all o' them ol' days."

"You lost a rosebush somewheres, Jimmie. I mind how you took it t' heart."

Jimmie mused on the familiar event.

"Ay," said he. "We fished at Run-by-Guess the year I lost my rosebush. She were a tender thing, that li'l' white rosebush. I kep' her in a li'l' red pot. An' I lef' her out overnight. Southerly wind, don't you mind? Stars out, Davy? A wonderful mild night! An' that li'l' rosebush had been cooped up under the cabin skylight for a fortnight

—an' she needed an airin', Davy—an' I put her out—an' forgot——"

Davy nodded.

"Frost bit her, Jimmie," said he. "I mind it now."

"Frost bit her deep, Skipper Davy. Wind jumped t' the nor'east. I was asleep. She died that night."

"More'n forty year ago!"

Jimmie sighed.

"Davy," said he abruptly, "you been t' the graveyard o' late?"

Skipper Davy started.

"What say?"

"'Tis a pretty place," Jimmie observed. "'Tis a friendly place, too."

"I—I isn't been out t' the—well, out there—for a long, long time," said Davy uneasily. "I 'low—well, I 'low I jus' don't care t'—t' cruise them parts."

"I been meditatin', an' in my ol' age I'm give t' tender ways," Jimmie went on. "There isn't much to do in harbor for a couple o' ol' codgers like we. I'm tired o' these dull times. Isn't you, Davy? I isn't had nothin' t' do in this here harbor since I fetched the *Wild Indian* up from Huskie Dog an' hung her down for the las' time. Bein' supposed t' be past my labor I isn't allowed t' track mud in the kitchen, an' I got t' be home in time for tea; an' that's all the trouble I got in these dull

times. I've growed tired of it. An' climbin' The Lookout the day, an' lookin' back over the hills, in this soft weather, I 'lowed somehow, that a couple o' ol' codgers like you an' me might's well clean up the graveyard."

There was silence.

"What you mean?" Davy quavered.

"Jus' what I says."

"Clean up the—the *graveyard?*"

"Ay."

"But—why?"

"Jus' t' put it shipshape."

"What you mean, Jimmie?" Davy's voice was alarmed. "Why clean it up?" Suspicion seized the old man. He was horrified. "You wasn't—you wasn't thinkin' o' puttin' things shipshape, was you—shipshape for—for me?"

"A hearty ol' whale like you!" Jimmie snorted.

"No, Jimmie? Well, well! Dear man!" Davy was still bewildered. He reflected. And he started, illumined. "Jimmie, b'y," said he in an anxious whisper, "you isn't thinkin' o' movin' in yourself jus' yet, is you?"

It shocked Jimmie.

"Who? Me? No!" he gasped indignantly.

"I'm glad o' that, anyhow," said Davy mildly. "I never thought of it afore. I'd be sort o'—well, sort o' lonely, b'y—lef' all alone here——"

Jimmie scrambled up.

"'Tisn't nothin' like that, Davy," he declared

heartily. "I can sleep soft anywheres, ol' shipmate, an' so can you, when it comes time t' lie down for good and all. You jus' come along t' that li'l' graveyard the morrow afternoon, an' I'll prick a course o' good conduc' for a couple o' ol' codgers like you an' me. An' I 'low, Davy," he added abruptly, "that you an' me had best gallop home t' tea. An' that's a fac'!"

Next day Uncle Jimmie Horn and Skipper Davy Lunt cruised over the hill to a sunlit hollow, back of the naked flank of The Jumping Jack, where lay the graveyard. It was still soft Indian Summer weather—sweet haze and ochre sunlight; but the sea was up overnight, rolling gray and unruffled over the Hook-an'-Line in the still afternoon, and booming in the Hole-in-the-Wall, and streaming and frothing through the cleft in Split Tooth. There was menace in the boom and gurgle of Hole-in-the-Wall and an obscure warning in the rush of water through Split Tooth. It was a vague menace—remote: yet the two old men of Linger Tickle, who had kept watch on the weather all their lives, were delicately sensitive to the threat of change and violence, and responded to the depression of the day, being downcast and disquieted.

Davy Lunt sulked in the wake of Jimmie Horn, vastly out of humor with the direction of the excursion.

"You go in with the sickle, Jimmie," said he,

reluctant at the graveyard gate, "an' I'll wait here with the rake."

"Isn't goin' t' back out, is you, Davy?"

"I do' know."

"Dang it, Davy! Oh, come on!"

Davy kicked obstinately at a stone in the road.

"I never did have no interest in graveyards in my youth," he complained with a whimsical, abashed twinkle, "an' in my age I finds I lack the habit. I'll jus' wait here, Jimmie."

"What's the sense in you waitin' here?"

"A good deal o' sense, Jimmie," Davy argued. "My ol' legs is tired. I'll rest. You go in an' overhaul the state she's in. Maybe there isn't nothin' t' do."

"Well!" Jimmie agreed.

"You come back an' report her condition," said Davy, relieved. "An' if she's foul, an' if you needs a hand——"

There was something to do. It was not much. Two hearty old codgers of an industrious habit could comfortably accomplish it all in the slow, gossipy hours of an Indian Summer afternoon. There were not many graves—a few defined plots: some separate, neglected mounds. Linger Tickle was not a place of consequence; it harbored not more than four hundred folk, and of those who once fished from its shelter and had gone their mysterious way for good and all, many had needed

no burial ashore. To sickle the long grass, to wrench the weeds from the short paths, to gather the litter of dead twigs, to rake away the wind-blown alder leaves—it was not much to do.

They began. They warmed to the kindly task. It was a pretty place. It was a friendly place, too. There were many friends.

"Who's that you're rakin' now?" Davy inquired.

"I do' know, Davy. He've no marker t' tell his name. Might be Jacob Luff."

"Think so, Jimmie?"

"Might be."

"Mm-m. Might be. Jacob died ashore. Jacob was a fine feller, Jimmie. 'Tisn't he, though. Too short. Mus' be Thomas Bolt."

"Small Tom, Davy?"

"Mm-m. I sailed along o' he t' Spanish ports on the *Lizzie Jones*. Well, well! Think o' Small Tom Bolt bein' here! Tom were a fine feller, Jimmie—none finer. I 'low this fat feller I'm puttin' shipshape is prob'bly Mean Michael Hines. Think o' he bein' here! By an' large an' judgin' easy, Mean Michael were a pretty fine feller, Jimmie. Nobody found the fish like Mean Michael Hines. An' he done me a good turn one season, Jimmie. If it hadn't been for a extra length o' cable I got from Mean Michael at Salmon Harbor I might have cast away the *Frolic* in the big easterly o' the Second Lean Year. I 'low I'll jus' put Mean Michael as trim an' tidy as I'm able."

And presently: "Jimmie whose grave you cuttin' now?"

"This wee grave? Mind li'l' Billy Sands, Davy?"

"Can't be li'l' Billy Sands, Jimmie."

"'Tis he."

"Jus' *can't* be, Jimmie! Li'l' Billy Sands was cast away such a wonderful long time ago. Can't be li'l' Billy Sands."

"'Tis he jus' the same. You mind un, Davy?"

"I minds un clear, Jimmie. Well, well! Li'l' Billy Sands! An' him lyin' here all these years! He were a fine lad, Jimmie—none finer. You an' me an' he used t' play h'ist-the-sails back o' my father's flakes by Wishbone. Too much mains'l on that punt o' his for a wee li'l' feller like he. Poor li'l' Billy Sands! I'm cleanin' up the Watsons now, Jimmie. Fine folk, Jimmie—the Watsons. None finer. Mind Mary, Jimmie? Winsome, weren't she? Died o' Young Tom. An' him turned out a scamp! I'm workin' on Jonathan now. I wonders where he've gone to, Jimmie?"

Uncle Jimmie straightened his back. He surveyed the little gathering of graves. He spoke, then, simply, definitely, in the way of old men who speak of such things at all.

"I 'low," said he, "they've all made harbor."

Davy nodded.

"Me, too," said he.

Jimmie said:

"Is you ever timid, Davy, about—puttin' out?"

Davy reflected.

"I do' know, Jimmie," he replied. "Is you?"

"Not so very. I'm tired."

"Me, too. I'm all tired out. Yet you've labor left in you, Jimmie. An' I'm past my labor."

"I've labor left in me, Davy," Jimmie boasted. "I've enough for a sealin' cruise."

"Ay."

They worked on. It was warm and still in the ochre sunshine of the hollow where the dead folk of Linger Tickle lay gathered. No threatening wind stirred the grasses; no ominous breath of any gale disturbed the buttercups and sweetbrier. It was a pleasant place—a friendly place. There were many old friends, all fine folk—none finer. Almost Skipper Davy had forgotten some; yet there was no acquaintance he was not rejoiced to renew. Skipper Davy had joined his generation; it relivened him to foregather once more with old friends in the mellow weather. All fine folk—none finer! Jimmie Horn sickled the long grass and Davy Lunt raked the dead leaves; and together they weeded the short paths, and gathered the dead twigs, and straightened the weathered headboards, and all the while they chattered of old friends, old times, old customs. Thus, in the irresponsible, dallying manner of children at work, they came, by and by, near the graveyard gate, where the Lunts and Horns had been laid away in the pomp of two square plots, side by side. Skipper Davy

surveyed the unkempt square where lay the Lunts. Gray headboards marked the graves. Some were fallen flat. A single stone—a brief, rude slab of slate, rudely carved—rose somewhat above the grass.

"See that there li'l' stone, Jimmie?" said Davy.

Jimmie crept on all fours to the little drab stone and peered at the inscription:

WEEP NOT DEAR PARENTS
FOR YOUR LOST TIS MY
ETARNEL GAIN MAY
MAY CRIST YOU ALL TAKE UP
THE CROST THAT WE
SHULD MEAT AGAIN

"You able t' read what it says, Jimmie?" Davy asked.

"Well, no," Jimmie apologized. "I isn't got my new spectacles with me. Anyhow," he confessed frankly, "I couldn't do it. Nobody never teached me that partick'lar bit o' readin' by rote."

"I got the blacksmith at Ginger Cove t' cut that stone. I 'low he wouldn't be counted much in these fine times; but he was called quite a scholar, Jimmie, in them ol' days. I'm told he made only one blunder in all that writin'. If you could read it, Jimmie, you'd find he put one word in twice by error. It's li'l' Jinny that lies there. That's my first. She come when I was fishin' Lack-a-

Day Bight an' went nex' season when I was fishin' by Mugford. I never knowed she very well. My ol' father don't lie here, Jimmie; he lost hisself somewhere down north. 'Tis thought he was blowed out an' foundered at sea. He were a great ol' feller t' drive a loaded vessel beyond caution, an' 'tis thought the habit overcome un at last. I was a wee lad at the time. I mind I cried a wonderful lot with fear. He were a fine feller, Jimmie —none finer. There's Martha. An' there's Tobias Alexander. An' here's a long grave, Jimmie. I wonders whose grave this is! 'Tis all alone in a corner as if 'twas waitin' for company——" And Davy stopped. "Jimmie!" he whispered, amazed.

"Ay, Davy?"

"This mus' be mother's grave!"

"This here grave I'm cuttin' now," said Jimmie cheerfully from the Horn plot, "is my mother's grave. She was wonderful fond o' flowers—my mother were. I wish she had lived t' see that there catalogue o' mine. Wonderful window-shelf she had, overlookin' the harbor water—hyacinths an' tulips an' geraniums an' fuchsias an' roses in li'l' red pots. I 'low that's where my fondness for flowers comes from. I 'low, too, I gets my tender ways from she. When I was a wee feller I used t' plant flowers on this here grave. My mother——" He paused. He rose. "Davy," said he, "I got a wonderful notion!"

Davy was interested.

"A notion?" said he. "You got a wonderful notion? What is it, Jimmie?"

"I'll go sealin' in the Spring o' the year."

"You!"

Jimmie laughed.

"Me!" he declared.

"Dear man!" Davy gasped. "You'll perish!"

"I'm not afeared o' that," said Jimmie. "I've labor left in me—labor a-plenty. I've gone fifty years t' the ice after swiles (seals) in the Spring o' the year an' I can go once more with safety. 'Tis long past the years when they fits schooners out for the ice, in these days o' steam: yet 'tis not a week since I heard the Tumble Harbor trader say that he'd try his luck in old way with the ol' *Gaff an' Gun,* nex' March, with Skipper John o' Fortune t' master her; an' I've sealed with Skipper John afore this—an' he'll ship me, Davy, dang if he won't! I wants cash, Davy—I wants cash o' my own earnin' t' spend free an' easy on the notion I've in mind. They is kind t' me, Davy. 'Tisn't that. They is jus' sot ag'in' waste. I wants cash o' my own. The swiles, Davy—ho, for the ice in the Spring o' the year! I'm sound in wind an' limb. I'm able. I've spirit. I've the stuff in me for a last cruise an' I'll win my share o' the fat. An' then, Davy——"

"What then, Jimmie?"

Jimmie was abashed.

"Well, Davy," he replied, presently, "I wants t'

buy some li'l' white rosebushes accordin' t' my catalogue."

"What you goin' t' *do* with 'em?"

"I wants t' plant a li'l' white rosebush on my mother's grave."

Skipper Davy stared at that old mound in the corner which seemed still to be awaiting its company.

He looked up.

"Me, too!" said he, hopelessly.

"Dang me," Jimmie protested, "if I don't buy enough li'l' white rosebushes for the whole danged graveyard!"

And the distant climacteric event was determined.

II

JIMMIE HORN'S LAST CRUISE

FROM the deck of the sealing schooner *Gaff and Gun* the crew watched the floe come down with the wind from the North Atlantic wastes. It was an ugly prospect. There was a wreck in it. Out of Tumble Harbor, in March weather, the *Gaff and Gun* had beaten out to The Funks, had floundered in White Bay, had fished the floes off the Horse Islands, had glimpsed the Cape Norman Light, and had found the fat in the Straits. The slaughter was over, the hold was full, the decks were still foul with blood and the drip of the pelts; and the *Gaff and Gun* had been caught napping by a northeast gale. The short day was near done and the first snow of the gale was in the air; but there was still light enough abroad for the slow, monotonous spectacle. In the northeast, whence the wind was jumping in gusts, it was blue-black with cold and snow and stormy cloud. In the west, however, the weather was serene—a red sun, not yet covered up by the gale, glowing brilliantly through a long, crimson slash, with edges of yellow fire. In this streaming light, charged with sunset color, the crew of the *Gaff*

and Gun, grouped forward, watched the ice come down.

Uncle Jimmie Horn muttered:

"Mm-m!"

And Skipper John o' Fortune said:

"What you think of it, Uncle Jimmie?"

To which Jimmie Horn replied.

"Mm-m."

There was no escape for the schooner. It was too late. She was trapped. Flutter here, flutter there, drive her north, drive her south—there was no getting out. With the canvas stowed away, she floated idly beside the inshore floe. She was caught there, helplessly, in a great lake of quiet, black water, rippling now to the touch of a rising wind. To leeward, beyond the horizon, the ice was jammed against the cliffs of the coast. It was stationary and immovable. To the north and south the lighter pans of the approaching floe, running in advance of the wind, were already closing into contact with the western barrier. Presently the floes would come together. All that remained to be disclosed to the crew of the *Gaff and Gun* was the extent of the catastrophe. It would probably be complete. Precisely what was to become of the schooner, however, was for the moment the sport of conjecture.

"Ecod!" the skipper declared. "There's still a glimmer o' hope for the bones o' the ol' girl."

Jimmie Horn said:

"Mm-m?"

There was a laugh.

"A glimmer!" the skipper insisted.

Uncle Jimmie shook his head.

"Mm-m!" said he.

It might turn out to be a gentle closing in of the ice. In that event, the gigantic pans of the pack, in adjusting themselves to the insuperable resistance of the shoreward floe, might leave the *Gaff and Gun,* uninjured by so much as a scratch, floating free in a fortunate gap of open water. In a soft, slow crush, moreover, a sunken pan, slipping under the hull of the schooner, might lift her delicately out of peril, and leave her canted high and dry, there to await the pleasure of fortune.

It was agreed, however, that the ice would crush the *Gaff and Gun* to little splinters, when the floes came together, and drop her to the bottom next day or next week, when the fields went abroad in a change of the wind. What actually happened was disaster beyond all those speculations.

Uncle Jimmie Horn grunted "Hut!" and turned away. Pious old Newfoundlander that he was, taciturn in strange company, bent and wrinkled, blear-eyed with age and foul weather, he had endured the cruise to his satisfaction.

"I isn't got too much spring t' me legs no more," he would say; "but I'm a hale ol' feller, with a stout heart, ecod, an' able for me labor—never you mind about that, me b'y!"

And that was true; old as he was—not even Uncle Jimmie himself could vouch for the number of his years—he was as hard as a knot; and he had proved as fit for the rough work of the ice, for killing and hauling and hardship, in blizzard or blinding sunlight, as any occasion of that last cruise had hitherto required him to be.

Perhaps the years—as the years will, according to their sinister power—had deprived old Uncle Jimmie of a good measure of his strength and agility; but he had won from them abundantly a sound substitute of cunning—the lore of the ice fields.

At any rate, he had made good his boast to Skipper Davy Lunt on the crest of The Lookout at Linger Tickle in the soft Indian Summer weather. There has been one last cruise to the ice left in him.

Nobody had known his purpose aboard.

"As for me," he had explained, "I'm jus' out for pleasure afore I goes my way."

"Is you havin' it, Uncle Jimmie?"

"I is!" Uncle Jimmie had replied. And he was. "Them li'l white roses," he would dream, "will sure-lee bloom!"

Now, having measured the approach of the floe with a knowing old eye, having surveyed the shoreward pack, having listened in a flash of amazement to the unconcerned chatter of the crew, and having measured once more the speed of the ice coming

down with the wind, the old man turned, grim and silent, and shuffled toward the forecastle.

There was a laugh.

"Uncle Jimmie, b'y!" Skipper John o' Fortune called.

"Sir t' you?"

Skipper John grinned.

"Where you goin'?" said he. "You isn't goin' t' *eat* again, is you?"

"Ay."

"Again?"

"Ay, sir," Uncle Jimmie answered, his gray brows lifted in surprise. "Why not, Skipper John?"

"'Tis the third time below."

"Think o' that now!"

"You'll have your ol' hulk under water, Uncle Jimmie."

Uncle Jimmie pushed back his cap to scratch his head.

"Well, no, sir," he replied, gravely. "I 'low I got a little more stowage room, sir, an' I was 'lowin' t' make a load of it, with a sip o' tea an' a small mess o' fried pork."

" 'Tis t' be a cold night," said the skipper, melting with affection for the old man.

"Mm-m," Uncle Jimmie agreed.

"Brew yourself a nice kettle o' tea, Uncle Jimmie, t' warm them ol' in'ards."

"An' fry a small mess o' pork, Skipper John."

"A mess o' pork too, Uncle Jimmie."

"In a tight place at the ice, sir," Uncle Jimmie drawled, indicating his stomach, "I never knowed no harm t' come t' nobody from havin' a dipper o' hot tea an' a small mess o' fried pork in the long pocket."

"You take your time," said the skipper.

"Mm-m," said Uncle Jimmie.

"I'll give you a hail when the ice closes in."

"Mm-m."

It was to be a wreck. Presently there was no doubt about that. Skipper John had already taken precautions against undue misfortune. There was grub on the shoreward floe. With the grub and the dunnage of the crew there was a vast hospitable heap of birch billets. All this was well inland of the edge of the ice. The impact would disturb the floe. It would not, however, damage the grub and the firewood. They were too well sequestered from the crush and grind and folding of the packs.

Candlestick Cove lay over the horizon in the darking west. With the *Gaff and Gun* gone down, the crew would wait for dawn there on the ice, in the comfortable warmth of a big birch fire, and brew tea, and yarn, and pipe a song or two. In the morning the men would foot it heartily for the cottages of Candlestick Cove.

There was loss in prospect. Nobody on deck, however, could descry any considerable peril. The loss was inevitable. Why not, then, turn a cheer-

ful face to the misfortune? To be sure, a change of the wind would send the ice abroad. It was something to be feared. In a veering of the gale the plight of the crew of the *Gaff and Gun* would be bitterly grave. Blowing off shore, the wind would sweep the ice to sea—scatter it broadcast over the remote and untraveled North Atlantic water. The men would take to the big pans and there remain, adrift and helpless, until starvation should put an end to the horror of their state, or the ice, broken into fragments by the sea and dissolving underfoot, should leave them to drown.

A violent switch of the wind to the west was not fairly to be counted a contingency of the situation. The wind was steady—fast rising, too, to the pitch and determined direction of a big blow from the northeast.

"A little picnic on the ice t'night, lads," said John o' Fortune. "'Twill be nothin' but pleasure."

This was to confirm the heartiness of the crew. And the response was generous:

"Jus' a little picnic."

"Oh, sure!"

"Nothin' but pleasure."

"In the mornin'," said Skipper John, "we'll all have a constitutional t' Candlestick Cove."

In the forecastle, all this while, the veteran old Jimmie Horn, who had come alive through more desperately tight squeezes than he could recall without industriously reflecting, was making the most

of a vital, immediate opportunity to warm his old bones and comfort and prepare his stomach. He was not in the least perturbed as he munched his bread, and ground his meat, and sipped his hot tea; but he mumbled a little, amiably, to himself, as old, old men will when alone, and dreamed vacantly at times, sitting very still, infinitely abstracted from all the concerns of the moment, in the way of the aged. Whatever was in his worn old mind, it was least of all, it seemed, that the *Gaff and Gun* would presently be wavering a last course to the bottom of the sea.

When the skipper warned him that the ice was close in, old Uncle Jimmie shouted:

"Jus' a jiffy, Skipper John!"

The skipper roared:

"You isn't *got* a jiffy!"

Uncle Jimmie placidly drawled:

"Jus' a jiffy!"

In no haste whatsoever, then, Uncle Jimmie swallowed the last of his dipper of tea, to make sure of the sugar, and crammed his mouth with bread and pork, and wiped his thin, gray beard with an air of complete and pleasant repletion—cargo all stowed, now, and the hatches down, ready for any weather. The bag of hard-tack on the forecastle table caught his eye. He scowled, in a muse of uncertainty, as old men will who stumble over trifles, and all at once thrust his claw into the bag, his old mind determined, and filled his

jacket pocket. It did not occur to him that the hard-tack would be some provision against the last assault of hunger. What he thought was that the hard-tack would be something to nibble in the wakeful hours toward dawn.

When he buttoned his jacket the bread in the pocket incommoded Uncle Jimmie; and for a moment—a fateful moment, as it turned out—he was on the point of throwing it away in a fit of aged impatience.

"Well, now, no," he thought; "maybe I'll want t' nibble it in the night."

Uncle Jimmie shuffled up the ladder, then into the wind and snow and dark, with five cakes of hard bread stowed away in his jacket pocket.

It was pitch dark when the floes came together. The black wind was charged with suffocating snow. It was full of merciless frost too—this burst of wild northeast weather. The lights of the *Gaff and Gun* were lost in the thick gale: morning would disclose the fate of the abandoned schooner. Landed on the southward floe, to escape the tumult and upheaval of the impact of the two vast fields of ice, the crew was gathered close about a roaring, red birch fire, which flamed and crackled and spat and hissed, and brightly illuminated, warm and yellow, a narrow circle of the pack, through which the snow streamed in a swirling, melting cloud. It was a comfortable, secure place, to be sure: a pic-

nic overnight—then a constitutional to Candlestick!

"Candlestick Cove t'-morrow night, lads," said the skipper, "for them that's fit an' able for the trudge."

"Mm-m," said old Uncle Jimmie.

"You feelin' fit an' able, Uncle Jimmie?"

"Mm-m."

What happened then was a manifestation of the lofty indifference of wind and ice to the peace and lives of the sealing crews. It was the incredible. The driven floe encountered the solid opposition of the shoreward pack. It had come lumbering down under the brisk whip of the wind: within the hour —the wind rising fast—it had gathered incredible speed. It was now a stupendously vast, close-packed mass, of an incalculable weight, advancing with incalculable momentum. The edge of the shoreward floe was crushed to a frosty powder. Inland of this the ice crumpled up. Both floes began to buckle under the slow pressure. Near the roaring birch fire great pans lifted themselves out of the press—ghostly shapes, dripping a rush of water—and wavered in the night and fell back into fragments.

With this convulsion there was a tumult—the swish of the wind, the scream of the pack, the explosion of the lesser pans.

Presently the pan on which the crew of the *Gaff and Gun* had taken refuge—where the men hugged

the fire, standing appalled, in the warm glow, by the crash and writhing of the ice—presently this great pan developed a weakness under the strain. It cracked in two. The halves lifted from the middle—then, slowly, hardly perceptibly at first, then all at once swiftly, to a perpendicular, whence in a moment, having flung off the crew of the *Gaff and Gun,* they fell flat and shattered, and the surrounding ice closed in with a rush. The roaring birch fire, and the grub and the dunnage of the crew, had meantime dropped into the sea, with most of the crew of the *Gaff and Gun.* After that, to the break of dawn, it was pitch dark on the quiet floes.

Old Jimmie Horn, mildly surprised if not gravely interested to find himself alive after the fury of the convulsion, slept the night through, snug in the dry lee of the hummock at the base of which his old bunk had by miraculous chance been tenderly deposited. It was no great feat of endurance—life had long ago inured old Jimmie Horn to hardship of that sort and degree; and precisely as the labor of years had inured him to hardship, so, too, had the weight of years deprived him of a lively interest in what had happened last and what was to happen next. The old man was apathetic with age; events had lost the heat of their importance; and his sleep was not disturbed by a feverish curiosity concerning the disclosures and fate of the morning.

"A small snooze," he thought, "won't do no real harm."

At dawn, before the rosy light was far spread, he bethought himself, with a grateful little start, of the bread in his jacket pocket.

"I'll nibble a bit o' breakfast," thought he

Nibble a bit? Well—no. Life had taught the old man the perfect mastery of economy. His hand came empty out of the jacket pocket.

"Anyhow," he determined, "I isn't so wonderful peckish."

Broad day brought five other survivors to old Jimmie Horn's company. Not one of them could describe the incident of his escape. There was an interval for which they could not account. Each began the tale of his experience in the same way, at a point subsequent to the upheaval of the pan: "Well, lads, I don't know how it happened, but all of a sudden I found myself lyin'——" And soon, in silence, they set out over the floe toward Candlestick Cove. The wind had fallen flat: there was no snow; and the April sun fell hot on the glistening white field. Jimmie Horn urged haste and hard labor to escape from the pack. A breeze, rising from the west, would cut them off. "A ol' feller like me," said he, "don't put no trust in no wind!" In this he expressed the wisdom of his years.

These six men, with the exception of Jimmie Horn, were all from Tumble Harbor. They were

born and had lived their lives there, without the interruption of any contact with the world to the south. It was a simple, pious community of fisher-folk. They were not vicious men. They were mild men—bucolic rather than bellicose. They were friends; and they had come close in a common catastrophe of wreck and death. Every man's power, moreover, was intimately known to the others. Nobody disputed, for example, that Tom Bald was physically the best man among them. Bald had long ago demonstrated that. It was known, too, that Sandy Lee was less than Dan Luff—that Jacob Ingils would outlast David Rumm. Whatever, indeed, one man may learn of another by being bred with him was known to these six men, each of the other.

It was not important; no vital advantage or disadvantage was involved—not yet. Consequently it was an amiable progress toward shore. Whenever Jimmie Horn lagged behind they waited for him; and when young Sandy Lee would sit down to rest or tumble in his tracks they patiently rested with him and heartened him with praise—for none would overreach or abandon the others. It was not the code. The code was to "Stand by." And as they proceeded, past noon, there was a puff of wind from shore, which blew higher—and fell away, and blew again, with angry purpose to continue as the day drew on. Even so, the men kept together; and, with twilight falling thick, and the

cliffs of the coast in view against the fading western sky, the six castaways came exhausted to a breach of water which the departing pack had opened against their escape.

There was a bitter laugh.

"Shipped out, lads!"

"Mm-m!" said Jimmie Horn.

"Anything t' eat, Uncle Jimmie?"

"Mm-m!"

This was taken for a negative. The question had been jocose. Why should old Jimmie Horn have anything to eat? The men dropped to the ice to rest. Meantime the pack moved slowly out to sea.

III

A GRIM LOTTERY

THREE days later the floe had run far out to sea with the offshore wind and was idling in the slow drift of the current. It was clear weather. The days were warm with sunshine. At night there was no considerable frost. By this time the floe was scattered. There was no wind to herd and drive the ice. In every direction, to the deep blue circle of the horizon, the sea, spread thick with glistening pans and little hummocks, appeared in changing, widening lakes and lanes of blue-black water. In the midst of this the castaways were marooned on a flat pan of ice. The area of the pan, secure and commodious at first, was all the while sensibly dwindling in the heave of the sea—fragments breaking free and dawdling away; and ultimately the pan would rot and disintegrate in the sun and running sea.

Jimmie Horn still had the five cakes of hard bread in his jacket pocket. In the beginning he might have nibbled them away in the dark. Now, however, the opportunity was gone—somebody was always awake; and desperate hunger is suspicious

and alert. Perhaps—even had he been able to accomplish the thing in secret—the old man would not have nibbled. At any rate, withdrawn into the deep abstraction of age, and capable of patient self-restraint, as old age is, Jimmie Horn kept his counsel. In the end he would have to share the bread; and a long life of narrow chances had taught him that, in the extremity of hunger they were then approaching, the division would be a critically delicate affair. For the moment he would not precipitate the uncertain issue.

There was heart in the crew. It exhibited itself in bantering, hilarious, bald talk:

"Ecod! Now in a pinch I'm a very good cannibal!"

"You like it raw, Tom?"

"I says a thankful grace, David, b'y, an' takes my meat as it comes."

A laugh broke out.

"Uncle Jimmie now—he's safe enough."

"Mm-m!" said Uncle Jimmie.

"Nobody hankers for a ol' codger like he."

"Mm-m!"said Uncle Jimmie.

"Now young Sandy Lee, there—well now, Sandy Lee, you're a fat, tasty-lookin'——"

Sandy Lee flashed into wrath.

"You keep your eyes off me!" he snarled.

"I was thinkin' my jaws——"

"You isn't goin' t' set no teeth in me!"

Taking this raillery in earnest and resenting it

in wrathful terror, with his lips drawn, his hands clenched, his eyes blazing, his body tense, Sandy Lee cut a comical figure, no doubt; but nobody laughed. It was the first note of discord; it was a revelation; and the effect of it was momentous. It divided the group, hitherto with friendly, common interests, into antagonistic individuals. It was every man for himself, now, and the devil take the hindmost! Imagination, too, was awakened. They were not thirsty—the frozen snow on the surface of the pan sufficed for drink; but they were famishing and would be ravenous. What would happen then? There would be no cannibalism—oh no; nothing of that sort! Yet—come to think of it, now, what would happen anyhow?

In consequence of the disturbing incident the men were presently morose, troubled, distrustful.

There was small chance of escape. No craft would pick them up—that was sure. A change of the wind might gather the floe together again and drive it inshore; but the wind was down. What little puffs were blowing in that spell of fine weather were running out to sea. When the castaways huddled up—like a litter of pups—for warmth and snatches of sleep that night there was no good-humored scuffling as before for the warmer places. Instead, there were some inimical snarls and a good deal of ill-tempered pushing. And awakened at last to the rose-and-white beauty of the morning, they were sullen and irritable. The

philosophy of the situation was determined: It was every man for himself! They were in no temper for the arrangement of a difference of opinion.

Only old Jimmie Horn was placid; and his gentle acquiescence in the harsh fate of them all was merely the apathy of old age. He sat on his lean haunches, with his lean arms about his lean knees and his old head down. It took him a long, long time to make up his slow, tired old mind about the disposition of the hard bread in his jacket pocket.

He debated this.

"I got t' do summat with that there bread," he muttered.

"God's sake!" Tom Bald spat at him. "You been mumblin' like a damned fool all mornin'!"

"Mm-m?" Jimmie inquired.

"I says stop it!"

"Mm-m!" Jimmie agreed.

Uncle Jimmie was old and tired. He did not defend himself. How was anybody to know, then, that his mumbling had to do with the stupendously important fact of five cakes of hard bread in the depths of his jacket pocket? Uncle Jimmie neglected to explain.

In the afternoon of the fifth day, the men were shivering, haggard, hopeless and wolfish.

They approached now the extremity of exposure and starvation. It was an abnormal state: they were all near mad. Young Sandy Lee was sobbing in an agony of hunger and homesickness and de-

spair. He whimpered for his mother until the others shut him off in an outburst of crazed exasperation. The wind was cold—it blew from the north; and the pan was slowly pitching in a black sea, which continually reduced it and occasionally encroached in a curling, swirling little wave. The coast lay to leeward; it was a niggardly consolation: the wind was light, the floe sluggish; and how far away the bleak cliffs were—nobody knew. The men were weak: yet they were by no means fordone. They were used to lying bedfellows with exposure; and hardy men, such as they, survive hunger for a long time. Their voices were husky; and their faces were horrible to behold—each to the other. It was hard to rise: they were inclined to stagger when they walked. Drawing on their reserve of strength, however, they could walk well enough.

All were still capable of a period of stout exertion—being moved to it by some strong impulse.

The April sun, falling from a clear sky, had hitherto kept them warm by day. True, the nights had been bitterly difficult; but in that brief, fortunate period there had been no considerable frost. And the men were equally alive and determined on life: no man among them—excluding, perhaps, poor old Jimmie Horn—had suffered more than another. Uncle Jimmie kept watch on the wind. It would rise. The floe would presently gather and move. It would strand on the coast. To-morrow?

—perhaps. Next day?—maybe. "A ol' codger" like Uncle Jimmie "never put no trust in the wind." And with the wind blowing its best, unless the wind blew high, it would be too late. By that time the men would be too weak to crawl ashore and discover the cottages of some harbor. But how if a man were nourished a little? How if a man had five cakes of hard bread in his stomach? A man could not travel far on one cake—but—on five—wind favoring, he would surely save his life. And the wind was blowing true—and rising.

There was salvation for somebody in Uncle Jimmie Horn's jacket pocket.

"Is you never goin' t' quit that damned mumblin'?" Tom Bald complained.

Uncle Jimmie looked up.

"Sittin' here on this pan o' ice," he replied, patiently, "I been thinkin'. I'm cold an' I'm hungry, an' I'm wonderful tired. I 'low my time has come. I'm on'y a ol' codger anyhow, lads, an' I isn't very much in love with life. A ol' codger like me grows weary. I wouldn't have no particular objection to another year or two; an' I been sort o' lookin' for'ard to a wee bit o' real pleasure this season. I wants t' live for jus' two reasons. One thing I wants t' do—the other I wants t' see. I can't tell you what I wants t' do; but I can tell you what I wants t' see. I wants t' see my garden bloom in the spring. I got a strawberry plant t'

home, lads, an' I'm free t' say that I would like t' see a strawberry afore I dies; but I don't mind much. I'm all tired out—an' I'm jus' a ol' codger anyhow; an'——"

"You goin' t' make a will?"

Uncle Jimmie scratched his head. He chuckled—broke into a cackle of laughter.

"Ecod!" said he, his lean old face screwed up in a grin. "I might do worse!"

"You're dodderin', Uncle Jimmie."

Jimmie Horn laughed again.

"Dodderin'?" he chuckled. "Who? Me? Far from it, my son!"

"Jus' sheer dodderin'!"

"Ah, well," Uncle Jimmie exclaimed petulantly, "you don't know what's in my mind!"

"I wouldn't give tuppence for what's in your mind."

"You'd give tuppence quick enough," Uncle Jimmie retorted in anger, "for what's in my pocket."

It was suggestive. Starvation drew the inference. It was the same in every mind. There was a startled silence. Uncle Jimmie got up. The men gathered about him.

Bald spoke:

"What you got in your pocket?"

"I got bread in my pocket."

"You got—bread?"

Uncle Jimmie's hand came out of his jacket pocket. It shook. "Is that bread," he chuckled, "or isn't it bread?"

It was bread. They licked their lips.

"Got any more?"

Uncle Jimmie had more.

"That's one," said he.

It was one. They stared at it. Their mouths ran water. Uncle Jimmie's hands were shaking so that he had to fumble for his pocket. All eyes followed his hand.

Uncle Jimmie was clumsy with agitation.

"That's two."

It was two.

"Two!"

Again the eyes followed the hand. "That's three."

It was three.

"Three!"

"That's four."

It was four.

"Four!"

"An' that's five."

It was five.

"Five!"

Uncle Jimmie's hands were overflowing. There were five cakes of bread in them—one, two, three, four, five!

"That all you got?"

"That's all I got."

"All you got—left?"

In answer to this insinuation Uncle Jimmie deposited the bread on the ice. He fingered the cakes until he found the one he sought. This one he handed to Bald for inspection.

"I nibbled that feller last night," said he—"when nobody knowed."

The marks of Uncle Jimmie's teeth were plain. It was true: the old man had nibbled the bread—but had resisted the temptation to consume it. Obviously he had not wronged them; but nobody praised him for this heroic self-restraint and generosity. They would have resented the least trampling on their rights; they were incapable now, in this pass of desperation and distress, of feeling gratitude or of discerning the occasion for it.

Bald grunted:

"Huh!"

Uncle Jimmie said:

"How now?"

And Sandy Lee, to the others:

"The ol' codger didn't eat none."

Having gone from hand to hand, the cake of hard bread returned at last to Uncle Jimmie, who deposited it with the others and fingering them all, with shaking hands, muttering and chuckling like a miser. The bread was common property. That went without saying. There was only one thing to be determined—how to divide it. To every mind the same question occurred at the same moment:

How should five cakes of hard bread be divided among six men? There would be crumbs wasted.

And then:

Why divide it among six men?

"I'm for drawin' lots," Bald proposed.

"Loser goes without?"

Bald nodded.

"Loser goes without."

It would be high play. It would have a brutal issue. One man would go without. Well, it was every man for himself! There were five chances to one against loss, and every man had faith in his own star. It was agreed by nods, without dispute, to draw lots. Uncle Jimmie was custodian of the bread. He had fallen abstracted again—sat, with his lean arms round his lean knees, staring into the north, where the gray wind was brewing. And Tom Bald, by tacit consent, arranged the lottery. He discovered pencil and paper, tore six ragged squares, marked one ragged square with a black, sprawling cross, placed them all in his cap, and with a shaking hand held the cap high for Uncle Jimmie and the four shivering others to draw from. The man who drew the square marked with the sprawling cross was to lose his share of the bread.

Bald lost.

"One o' them bits o' bread," said he quickly, "won't do nobody no good!"

There were tears in his eyes.

"Well," Rumm laughed, "it won't do *you* no good!"

"Won't do nobody no good," Bald reiterated. "Not jus' *one* o' them bits o' bread."

The implication was that the five cakes of bread together would do somebody a great deal of good. It was an attractive suggestion. Why not? Why not draw lots for the whole? The winners were flushed and overbold with triumph. There was no dissent. Yes—they would draw again; but when Bald declared "I'm in on this new deal!" they protested. Bald had lost. What right had he to the bread? "Well, it's a new deal, isn't it?" he argued; and they squabbled bitterly until nearly dusk—the heat of anger and self-interest and hatred growing momentously more fervent all the while. It was manifestly unfair for Bald to claim a part in the new lottery; but Bald was a big man, and when he swore—"By Heavens, I'll be in on this thing or there'll be trouble!"—they took him in.

Again the rugged squares and the black cross—this time the cross to win.

Uncle Jimmie won.

"I'm a ol' codger," he complained crossly, "an' I don't want no bread."

Uncle Jimmie Horn settled himself for death. He turned impatiently from the incredulous group. Doubtless he thought of the li'l' white roses that once were to have bloomed in the sunlit hollow

beyond the naked flank of The Jumping Jack at Linger Tickle. No roses would bloom there. Well —what matter, after all? Mother—would understand. It may be that Uncle Jimmie thought also with regret of his strawberry plant. Twice now he had failed with the strawberry plant—there had been no fruit; but he had cherished it, and this season—this season, in the garden of the cottage by Thimble Rock, who could say there would be no miracle of a strawberry? It was all worth living for—the mere expectation of a real strawberry and of the li'l' white rose that might bloom on a sacred mound in the sunlit hollow. Still—what matter? Mm-m? What matter?

Though Uncle Jimmie was old and worn out with labor and cold, and not troubled by the fear of death, which now seemed to have drawn very close, his renunciation wore the aspect of nobility and did not fail of a momentary impression; for with the wind rising—and five cakes of bread—

Bald was eager.

"Want us t' draw again, Uncle Jimmie?"

"Mm-m!" Uncle Jimmie agreed.

With Uncle Jimmie eliminated, the chance for each was enormously improved—four to one now. With Bald cast out, it would be three to one. The outcry against him broke with fury.

"I was in afore," said he grimly, "an' I'll be in again!"

A snarling show of teeth was an indiscretion that

brought him into a gathering peril. The animosity against him was forearmed and consolidated. He was not acute enough to be aware of this. He was a big man, with a big man's defiant faith in his own physical strength. He was the big wolf of the pack. They knew it. Bald had thrashed them all at one time or another since they were boys at Tumble Tickle. His superiority in this respect had not been questioned in years. They were individually in terror of him. And when he roared, "I'll be in on this or you'll all go overboard!" they left him alone, to tear the ragged squares and make a sprawling cross; but his threat had stirred up fear.

Overboard? It contained a suggestion. What if Bald lost? He was in an ugly mood. What would he do? They reflected. It was disquieting.

"Now!" said Bald. "Draw—an' be damned t' ye!"

Here was high play—men could not play higher—and there was cruel suspense in the situation: yet the drawing, accomplished in the fast failing light, was without visible agitation. And its progress was silent, so that the wind, sweeping over the field of ice, asserted itself; and the hiss and swish of the waves, breaking now over the windward edge of the pan and crawling persistently in, was ominously distinct.

Sandy Lee won.

"My God!" Bald sobbed. "Oh, my God, I'm so hungry!"

Sandy Lee began to cry. His lips were awry and working; he was mouthing foolishly, and tears overran the deep, black sockets of his eyes. Dan Luff sobbed. David Rumm turned away. Jacob Ingils wrung his hands and prayed. Tom Bald stormed at Lee and his luck. As for the bread—it was still beside Uncle Jimmie. Sandy Lee gathered it in his two hands and retreated to the leeward edge of the pan. It was dry there. He squatted—the bread on the ice before him, one hand encircling it in defense. The others watched him with flaring curiosity and interest. Their mouths watered again. They gulped. They were like a pack of famished wolves. Sandy Lee took up one cake, glanced furtively from man to man, like a dog uncertain of permission to eat, and approached the bread to his twitching lips.

Bald started. Dan Luff started. David Rumm started. Jacob Ingils started. A start and tremor might run through a circle of hungry wolves at the same instant of climax in the same circumstances.

Sandy Lee hesitated.

"Eat it, you fool!" Bald screamed.

"You won't let me," Sandy Lee whimpered.

Bald flung off his jacket and sprang to the center of the pan.

"I'll fight you for it!" he roared.

It was every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost! Starvation had crazed them. Bald had precipitated a battle royal for the bread. No

Every Man for Himself.

man could elect to stand aside—a divine reluctance would not excuse him. It was fight or perish. The object was clear—each to cast the other off the pan and be rid of him. And the end was clear—one man would survive. And so they began—those five starving, furious wretches—fighting in a delirium, each in terror of the others and every man for himself. But Uncle Jimmie was not concerned; he was a very old man—exhausted, near death, apathetic. He sat apart on his lean haunches, with his lean old arms around his lean old knees. The direction of the wind, rising in the dusk, engaged his attention.

When the struggle staggered near him Uncle Jimmie haunched and braced himself, and turned his back.

He wagged his head in disapproval.

"Mm-m!" said he.

In a promiscuous encounter of this sort the general strategy is always the same. It was inevitable now. It was not the weakest who perishes first—it is the strongest. Bald had terrified them: he was the common enemy; and there was the concerted rush to dispose of him. He was caught off his feet and flung into the water. He perished. The men sprang apart. Each was afraid of the others. There was a pause. In this there was a swift exchange of glances. They settled on Jacob Ingils. He was most to be feared by the others. Jacob Ingils screamed. He perceived that he was to be

the next victim—and he was. The strength was frightened out of him. His resistance was inconsiderable. They combined and rushed him off the pan. He, too, perished.

Not more than a minute and a half had elapsed since Tom Bald sprang to the center of the pan and roared.

"I'll fight you for it!"

Precipitate affairs of this sort, no matter how pious and inoffensive the previous disposition of those engaged, go swiftly, mercilessly, without reflection, to their consummation.

As though by prearrangement, Sandy Lee and Dan Luff turned on David Rumm and locked with him. It was a slower struggle. Weak from starvation in the beginning, and now with a depleted reserve, Sandy Lee and Dan Luff could not easily overcome David Rumm. The struggle staggered and sprawled from the center of the pan to the edge and back to the center. It went then, in a rush, to the edge, where it halted on the brink. And it was not David Rumm who perished then. It was Dan Luff.

For a moment the three men swayed on the brink. They were poised over the sea—locked and struggling in mutual horror for balance. The lightest impulse of old Jimmie Horn's hand could have overcome them. A gust of wind might have toppled them off. Presently they settled back on the ice—Dan Luff the innermost; flung his weight against

Sandy Lee and David Rumm to dispose of them both at once. The assault failed. It was treachery. Sandy Lee so regarded it; and the recoil was instant. Sandy Lee and David Rumm combined against Dan Luff. Luff collapsed. His limp and unconscious body was kicked into the sea. And Lee and Rumm, a fair match, both gasping, confronted each other.

Both despaired. Each knew his own weakness. Had there been a pause there would have been a compromise. But there was no pause. Neither dared wait. They grappled. It was nearly dark now of a thickening night. The light was gray and thin, the last of it flowing from a cold, silver streak, low in the west; and the wind had whipped the floe underway toward the land in the south. Sandy Lee and David Rumm fought to the death. An equality of exhaustion prolonged the struggle. The light failed altogether. It was dark. They fell, squirmed, rose, staggered toward the hiss and flash of the edge of the pan, revolving, each in a forlorn effort to swing the other into place for the last push. And they stumbled and fell again—and rolled off the pan together.

By and by old Jimmie Horn cocked his ear. His ear caught no unusual sound. There was a sweep of the rising wind and the hiss and swish of the water breaking over the windward edge of the pan. It was over, then? He turned. Ay—he was alone on the pan! They had done for themselves. Not

a man was saved from the bestial turmoil. Beasts —they had fought for life like beasts! For life? Uncle Jimmie reflected. He said: "Mm-m!" He muttered: "Might's well see, anyhow." It was black dark. He took his bearings. He had no strength left to rise, but crawled, a little at a time, in the direction of that spot on the pan which the terrified Sandy Lee had occupied when Tom Bald roared "I'll fight you for it!" And the bread was there. It was dry and sweet. No wave of salt water had immersed it. Uncle Jimmie's fingers closed on a cake. It was his. No man was left to dispute possession. They were all dead and gone.

Uncle Jimmie sat up.

"Might's well nibble a bit," he thought.

In the warm sunshine of the morning, three men of Whalebone Bight, having first mistaken the old man for a seal on the stranded floe, carried him ashore to the comfort of their cottages. He mumbled something about "a strawberry and a li'l' white rose bush." Nobody could fathom the mystery of this. There were no strawberries or rosebushes on the floe.

II

THE LONG ARM

I

THE ESCAPE FROM PEPPER TICKLE

AT Pepper Tickle of The Labrador, in the north, there was a departure shortly before daybreak from the familiar security of port into the precarious chances of the long White Coast. John Marsh harnessed his dogs in terrific haste, with the mark of Cain on his soul and the black pack of horror on his back, and lashed the team into the deep snow of the bitter trail to the south. Under the whip of terror he came through the deep snow of Lean Wood, beat his dogs across the bleak wastes of Rolling Barren and was approaching the ice of the bight between Lack-a-Day Head and Coachman's Cap. There was no yelp behind; he was heartened; and when from the crest of Long Ridge he beheld the ice of the bight below —a swift, smooth course for the dogs—there was less of fear in his heart than of the dregs of horror. There was nobody behind—nobody! At any rate, there was nobody within sight—within reach. Consequently, with the smooth ice of the bight lying below, there was nothing to fear.

But Marsh was mistaken; soon after daybreak Rime and Calk had taken the trail in red rage with

a Hudson's Bay Company's spanking team of nine, and all this while had been drawing nearer. They were in the last snow of Lean Wood: the clean-swept crust of Rolling Barren was beyond, and they were well fed and fit to drive night and day. Marsh, in a flush of elation, decided to rest—to lie the night in the snow on the leeward side of the ridge, the day being then spent, but Rime and Calk, having floundered out of Lean Wood, pushed forward.

The next morning Marsh successfully crossed the bight between Lack-a-Day Head and Coachman's Cap. The wind had changed in the night: heretofore it had been steadily blowing off shore, with a touch of south in its direction; but it was now running in from the waste—all the while rising, too, with a hint of snow in the smell of it and in the scowling color of the horizon whence it sprang. Having struggled up the high, broken shore of the bight about noon, Marsh's dogs, weak and lean of starvation and labor, were momentarily exhausted; but Marsh, having turned to glance back over the wide expanse toward Lack-a-Day Head, and having fancied a sight of two men and a train of dogs, far away on the ice, moving like seals toward Coachman's Cap, cracked his whip over the reluctant team and followed in the wake of the komatik, making, in a new tumult of terror, into Northeast Barrens, on the trail of Fool Harbor.

An hour later, in the midst of the bight between

Lack-a-Day Head and Coachman's Cap, the delicate intricacies of which Marsh had previously crossed, Rime's komatik dropped through a thin patch of the floe and vanished to the bottom of the Atlantic. Rime cut the dogs from the traces and bade them to their own devices. They were of no further advantage; they were an encumbrance, even a potential menace—the pack of nine lusty huskies, whose slender rations of frozen fish had gone to the bottom with the sled.

After that the dogs followed Rime and Calk ashore and up the broken cliff to the highlands and the first bleached reaches of Northeast Barrens. At first they frisked and fought at leisure, glad to be rid of the insistent labor of the komatik; but as the day drew on toward a windy dusk, with no crack of the whip or crisp command to haste, the absence of an accustomed routine and discipline dismayed them. In the end they followed close to the heels of Rime and Calk, downcast and uneasy. Rime and Calk ignored them. Thus a familiar bond was severed: the pack was rebuffed to its own concerns and its natural state; and this definite detachment from the two men bewildered and troubled the dogs.

Calk said:

"No sign o' Marsh on the Barrens. I reckon he'll get away, Rime."

Rime replied:

"I do' know, Calk. He may meet with mishap

hisself. 'Tis a long coast we travel. We'll go along t' Fool Harbor an' outfit there t' follow. I knows the way t' Fool Harbor like a chart. Havin' been born an' raised there I can't stray. An' I'll be glad t' get back again from the Post at Pepper Tickle for an hour or so—I will that, Calk!"

Calk said:

"'Twill be a labor t' make Fool Harbor. We'll be bothered by weariness afore long."

"Give me my seven senses," Rime replied, "an' I'll go anywhere a man can live."

"I've knowed times an' places," said Calk, "that would make seventy senses look like a short allowance o' wits."

"I really needs but two," Rime boasted. "Let me see an' hear. That's all I ask."

They trudged on.

"The dogs is hangin' wonderful close," said Calk. "That's good. We isn't goin' t' lose un after all. They're on our heels all the while."

"They'll follow," Rime agreed.

"No countin' on Joker. That dog would as lief live with his brothers in the timber as anywhere else."

"He'll follow with the pack."

"We got t' lure that pack t' Fool Harbor, Rime. We got t' have dogs t' follow Marsh with. There's likely no team at Fool Harbor. An' if there does

chance t' be a fresh team there, Marsh will snap it up. We got t' keep our dogs somehow, Rime."

"They'll follow all the way."

"They'll be near mad with hunger afore we makes Fool Harbor."

"That's why they'll follow."

"A hungry dog will follow a man like a wolf. He'll keep right on, hopin' that something will happen sometime t' ease the pain in his belly."

"It always does happen."

Calk turned to glance at the pack.

"They're taggin' us jus' like wolves," said he. "They makes me think o' wolves. I reckon they won't leave us."

"Oh, they'll hang on!"

"That's good!"

For a mile the men trudged in silence. Then Calk spoke again. He was disturbed.

"You hang on t' your dog-whip," said he.

"Oh," Rime replied lightly, "the dogs won't bother us none. I isn't afraid of a pack o' dogs."

"They isn't your dogs."

"That don't matter none. They're the Hudson's Bay Company's dogs an' they knows who I is an' all about my notions o' mastery."

Rime and Calk forced the march through a fringe of spruce to the crusty snow of the barrens with a resolution born of the need to achieve their objective without delay. The loss of the komatik

was a catastrophe. It had brought them face to face not only with the escape of Marsh, who was plunging south, somewhere ahead, but with the doubtful problem of their own survival.

That there was probably sustenance enough for the toilsome march to Fool Harbor was due to Rime's caution and foresight. Confronting a passage of the uncertain ice of the bight in the morning, he had transferred a saving modicum of the food in the grub box on the komatik to his own pockets, commanding Calk at the same time to slip the essential ax in his belt, to which extraordinary precautions Calk had sagaciously added a tin cup; and the food was still in Rime's pockets, hard-tack and the best of a pound of caribou meat, and the ax was still in Calk's belt. An allowance of hard-tack and the best of a pound of caribou meat, provided there was no delay, no accident or long interval of foul weather, would carry them to the cottages of Fool Harbor. Fool Harbor was at the foot of Topmast; and the crest of Topmast, a landmark, white against the gray sky, was visible ahead.

Rime caught the first glimpse of Topmast when the men emerged from the fringe of spruce.

"There she is," said he with satisfaction, "as true as a beacon light!"

"She don't shift," Calk observed dryly.

"I tells you, Calk," Rime declared, "it fair thrills me t' clap eyes on her again."

"Ay."

"All my life long I've been fightin' up to her from sea an' shore."

"Fog an' snow."

"Ay. If 'twasn't for Topmast," Rime laughed, "we'd none of us never get home from nowhere."

"If we push hard the day," said Calk, "we'll haul her down the morrow easy enough, an' sleep soft an' warm an' full-fed."

"In fair weather."

"We'll likely have fair weather."

"No."

It began to snow before dusk. Dry, feathery flakes, shaken from the northeast, played past in a rising wind. Thus far the barrens were clean. It was land. A succession of northeast winds, blowing in from the sea, had swept it to a crust. Rime and Calk pushed out from the shelter of the spruce, bound to thrust their advance to the last limit of the light, there to sleep as they could, or, failing sleep, to wait for the dawn; and the dogs followed in their wake. Presently the barrens were smoking with the frosty snow. Topmast disappeared. The wind began to bite. It blew high and cold, thickening all the while with snow as fine as dust—as blinding and as stifling as dust. The light dwindled. By and by Rime and Calk stumbled on a niggardly patch of bowlders and stunted spruce. It was shelter. In the lee of a big bowlder, on the leeward edge of the spruce, they paused to rest and deliberate; and while they talked, enveloped in

a dense black current of snow, and nine dogs of the pack waited restless and alert near by. It was their feeding time. They were hungry.

Calk called to Joker:

"Hi, b'y! You Joker! Come 'long side here! Good ol' dog! Wheet! Wheet! Huyh! Huyh!"

Joker stared at Calk.

"That's queer!" said Calk. "He won't fawn. Why won't he fawn, Rime? He won't came when I calls un. Why not? Eh? What you make o' such saucy behavior as that? I don't like it."

"He's nobody's servant now," Rime replied, "an' he knows it."

"Discharged from duty?"

"Every man for himself," Rime quoted.

"I wish you had fed them dogs las' night," said Calk. "They're too hungry to be trustful. That's the trouble with un."

"I done the best I knowed how las' night. We fetched a small allowance o' dog-meat, Calk. The dogs had t' go short-rationed."

"Oh, I knows that! I isn't pickin' flaws."

"There was jus' one meal left."

"Too bad we lost it!"

"Well, it don't matter much."

"I 'low not," Calk agreed dubiously. "It might, though," he added.

All the dogs were full-grown. They stood two feet and a half high and each weighed about one hundred pounds. No sentimental rhetoric would

venture to describe them as the Friend of Man. They were slaves and savages. There was no warm light in their eyes. Even when they fawned, it was a pretense of affection and amiability. Their eyes remained cold, watchful, suspicious. Not one of the pack could be trusted. They yielded to hunger and abuse. No other influence was applied or recognized. They had gone hungry for two days; they must go without food for a day or two more. It is not to be assumed, however, that Rime and Calk were therefore in danger. The dogs were cowards. So long as the men could stand up and defend themselves they were safe. In the event of accident they would be attacked. If accident incapacitated them, and if the dogs were made aware of the incapacity or suspected it, the attack would be immediate and final. Thus far, Rime and Calk were eminently able to take care of themselves. The one had a whip—the other an ax. And the whole pack knew it.

All this while Marsh had urged his lean, complaining dogs across Northeast Barrens toward Fool Harbor, himself shaken and exhausted by the laborious haste of his going. When the barrens began to smoke in a rising wind, when the wind began to bite and the dusk to lift out of the ominous east, he was still in the swept open, bewildered and gasping. That it was to snow he knew—that it was to blow and freeze; and the sure imminence

of the night and long gale enlivened his terror with new visions of disaster. Caught in the open by a blinding snow, he would be perilously delayed, if no worse; and Calk and Rime were behind like two tireless wolves of the timber—Calk and Rime with a full, competent team of dogs and the will and strength to challenge any hazard of the coast. Would it be Calk and Rime? It would surely be Calk and Rime! Marsh laid on with a long, scorching walrus whip: he screamed husky maledictions —stumbled on in the wake of the blundering, crawling komatik. He looked behind—all day long he had kept a scared, searching eye on the reaches of the waste from which he had emerged; and there had been nothing to see—there was nothing to see now. By and by, when the light was near gone, he passed a clump of starved spruce, called Ragged Wood, and shaped a darkening course toward Rattle Gully.

In the lee of the big boulder behind which Rime and Calk had found shelter there was a drift. It had grown almost as high as the rock with the slow accumulations of many northeast gales of snow. A back current of the high winds, helped by drafts from below, had fashioned a curving wall of the great drift. It curved out from the body of the boulder and curled in toward the top. Between the rock and the concave wall of the drift there was a commodious space. The thin-edged ridge of the

drift, curling toward the rock as it grew, almost roofed the space.

Having discovered the fortunate refuge, Rime and Calk gathered wood for a fire. Calk broke the crust with his ax and Rime searched the snow for faggots. It was slow work. A good deal of wood was accumulated, however, before the night turned black—dry wood from the ground and dead limbs from the stunted trees. There was enough for the night. Rime and Calk crawled into the shelter and gratefully stowed themselves away from the bitter sweep of the wind. By that time the dogs had abandoned hope of food and dug themselves holes in the snow. Before long the snow drifted over them and covered them up. They would lie quiet until dawn.

"I wonders where Marsh is," said Calk.

"Fool Harbor," Rime replied, "an' snug an' warm. Dang the wicked, anyhow, Calk! They've all the luck an' comfort in this life."

"We've lost that man, Rime."

"Not yet. 'Tis a long chase."

In the lee of the boulder there was comfort enough to keep Rime and Calk alive. The wind was blowing higher than ever and the temperature had fallen sharply; but nothing worse than whisps of the gale penetrated the shelter and the mortal quality of the cold was mitigated by the little fire. Neither Rime nor Calk would freeze. They were dry—they were clad in thick seal-hide, from boots

to mitts and hoods; and they hovered over the blaze, which, when they had melted the snow in the tin cup and eaten hard-tack, they fed with discreet restraint.

Yet the shelter was hardly tolerable. Smoke filled it. The swirling, lurid cloud choked Rime and Calk. Their eyes smarted and ran tears. They rubbed their eyes and coughed the smoke from their throats and nostrils. There was no sure, final escape, however, from the misery and slow damage of the smoke. The cold confined the men to their shelter. By midnight it was so cold that when Rime scorched his bare palms over the fire frost formed in the hairs on the back of his hands. Consequently, whatever degree of damage the smoke might work, it must be challenged and endured. No man could live the night through in the gale outside.

Calk and Rime knew that the smoke threatened them.

"Wonderful hard on the eyes," Calk observed. "Agh!" he coughed. "I'm in pain!"

"The smoke?" Rime replied. "It blinds me too."

"I'm not able t' bear it."

"You *got* t' bear it."

"My eyes feels jus' as if they was full o' needles."

Rime laughed.

"You is in a sad state, Calk," said he. "My eyes feel no worse than if somebody had shook a pepper-box into them."

"Jus' like needles," Calk repeated.

"Ay."

"The thrust of a million red-hot needles."

Rime was annoyed by the reiteration. It was nothing to annoy a man. Yet Rime was in the way of being annoyed by trifles. It was the irritability of misery.

"Calk," said he impatiently, "you—you *trouble* me! Don't whine no more. *I* knows how you feels. Eyes is all the same, no matter whose head they're in. What hurts your eyes hurts mine. An' the same with damage as with pain. 'Tis neither more nor less in your eyes than mine. Now, hold your tongue!"

"If you suffered as much as me," Calk protested, "you'd complain as much."

"I would not."

"Ye would!"

"I've never trained myself t' complain," said Rime, with truth. "I enjoys my troubles alone."

"I've heared you whimper afore this."

"You've knowed me all your life," Rime replied, in anger, "an' you've never heared me whimper. I don't do it. An' you knows I don't do it."

"Keep your temper, Rime."

"I isn't goin' t' be lied about by you."

"I didn't mean nothin', Rime. What's the matter with you anyhow? I never knowed you t' carry on like this afore. You're—you're *surly!*"

"Surly? Me?" Rime demanded.

Calk perceived the drift to a fretful quarrel, proceeding from the wretchedness of the situation, and evaded the issue.

"Well, anyhow," said he, uneasily, "we better be careful of our eyes in this here smoke."

"We'll be as careful as we can be."

"I've no wish t' be smoke-blind an' helpless in the mornin'."

"We're forced t' risk that," said Rime, amiably. "We got t' keep the fire, isn't we? What else?"

" 'Tis surely as frosty as death!"

" 'Twould be a worse fate t' freeze solid than go blind for an hour or two."

"We got t' keep sight enough between us t' see ol' Topmast in the mornin'."

"I'll lead you."

"They says a blind man's a false guide."

"Blind or not," Rime boasted, "I'm able t' find Topmast from the midst o' Northeast Barrens. No trouble about that. Give me a glimpse at dawn," he added, indulging in an alliterative hyperbole, "an' I'll be there at dusk."

"You'd stray, Rime."

"I've done wonders afore."

"Not blind."

"All we got t' do is wait until we can see the crest o' Topmast," Rime insisted. "I can carry the course once I'm started."

"We isn't got no time t' wait."

"Time enough for a pair o' hardy stomachs."

"Anyhow," said Calk, "I reckon I'll step outside an' let the wind wash my eyes out."

"No harm in that."

"I'll come back when I'm too cold to remain."

"Do, Calk. I'll mind the fire. An' when you comes back I'll cleanse my own eyes."

Outside, in the blustering dark, Calk stumbled over a dog. What happened then shocked him to the marrow. The dog snapped at him—leaped away and snarled, seeming to have crouched for attack; and the sleeping pack, disturbed and instantly alert, sprang each from his drifted snow-hole and snarled and growled in chorus. For a moment Calk held himself tense, expecting a rush; and for the first time the presence of the pack appeared as a definite, overwhelming menace.

But the growling subsided. And Calk considered the more imminent menace of the wind. It was blowing a sixty-mile gale by that time. In the open, with no cluster of spruce and boulders to break the push and slap of it, the wind would have caught Calk off his feet and flung him down. He hugged the lee of the boulder until his eyes were clean of smoke and cooled off the blistening affliction of pain. When he was perilously cold he returned to the fire.

Rime then sought relief in the air. And the night crept its wretched course toward a wild dawn—Rime and Calk taking turns in the open.

"Damn them dogs!" Calk whimpered.

"What's this!" cried Rime, astounded. "A wicked slather o' profanity, Calk? 'Tis no time for such work."

" 'Tis the first oath ever I uttered aloud."

"It slipped easy then."

"Every time I goes out," Calk complained, bitterly, "I'm afeared of an onset. I wish you had left that pack t' go down with the komatik. They'll be savage with hunger the morrow. An' an achin' belly will neither wait nor choose. What's meat is food to a dog, Rime. I don't like them dogs. I wish they was dead."

"They isn't your dogs."

"If they was," Calk declared, "I'd strike their brains out whilst I could get near them with an ax."

Rime was determined.

"As for me," said he, "I'll lure that pack t' Fool Harbor if I haves t' wheedle it all the way."

"You won't be required t' coax, Rime," said Calk significantly. "That pack will follow closer than you will expect."

"What's t' fear?"

"There's enough t' fear. God knows it! You're stupid, Rime, if it has missed your understanding."

"I got my dog-whip."

"Ay."

"You got your ax."

"True."

"Well?"

"Ye dunderhead!" Calk burst out. "We'll both be blind on the barrens!"

Some cantankerous exchanges in the morning disclosed the wisdom of silence.

Then Calk began to suspect Rime. Rime had the meat in his pocket. Would Rime nibble the meat in the seclusion of the storm?

For the time Calk mastered the suspicion.

"I jus' mustn't think about such a thing as that," he determined, "or I might come t' believe it. I've no wish t' do wrong. I'll guard my thoughts."

The suspicion returned.

"'Tis jus' the product o' my misery," Calk argued.

Night came. Nothing was eaten. The decision was to save the meat for strength in the last march. It was Rime's suggestion. It occurred to Calk that Rime might not as positively have proposed to husband the meat had Rime been as hungry as he. This was unreasonable; and Calk was aware of it. At any rate, Rime could not have nibbled the meat. It was frozen as hard as stone.

"I'm fair distracted with the first pangs o' hunger," Calk thought, striving against the fantastic suspicion. "I'm in peril o' bein' mastered by evil thoughts."

Rime thought:

"I'm jus' as glad the meat's in my pocket. I might be evil-minded in my misery an' mistrust Calk if he had it."

II

THE OLD BULLY OF FOOL HARBOR

HAVING stumbled down Rattle Gully o' Topmast in the first dark of the night before, Marsh had come safe to the warm lights of Fool Harbor. That wild day, while Calk and Rime squabbled and hungered and suffered the stinging agony of the smoke in the lee of the big boulder on Northeast Barrens, he spent warm and secure in the kitchen of Queer John Tall's cottage, beseeching and bargaining for the only dogs in Fool Harbor, which were the property of Queer John Tall himself. Marsh's own dogs were fordone—weak, footsore, melancholy: he had killed their strength and courage; they were manifestly unfit for a long trail traveled in haste and must be abandoned. In the end, the vital urgency of Marsh's mad journey to the south, which he described, honestly enough, as a matter of life and death, and the heavy necessity upon him and the moving quality of his appeal, won Queer John Tall's assent to the use of his dogs and his company; and the start was arranged for the first light of morning, weather favoring—a swift cross-

ing of the rolling lands of Poor Luck to Windy Tickle, whence Queer John Tall was to return with the dogs, leaving Marsh to proceed from that point of departure with a new team if he could get one. And speed was to be the word—light travel, short rations for dogs and men, and no guns to cumber the journey.

"A quick journey," Marsh stipulated. "We'll travel as light as we're able."

"I'd like t' carry a gun."

"Not an extra pound. We'll risk it without guns; it's good going to Windy Tickle."

"I've no love for a short allowance o' rations. I likes t' feed both myself an' my dogs."

"Not a pound of anything more than necessary!"

"Ay; but——"

"Not an ounce too much!"

"Pother o' haste!" Queer John Tall complained. "I don't *like* it! It frets me."

Marsh said:

"'Tis delay that frets me."

And John grumbled:

"Fleein' like a hunted beast! I don't like it at all. It frets me."

Smoke, Queer John Tall's old bully, was from down North. A glance disclosed his origin to a knowing eye. It was neither his cut nor his color that persuaded the beholder of the touch of Timberblood: it was his manners. A dash of Southern

blood eases a dog's behavior in company. Smoke had no ease at all. Could a man fetch him a hearty clap on the haunch and win a wag and a grin? Not so! Smoke knew his distance and kept it. "I've no wish," he seemed to say, "for none o' them small familiarities. You practice your frivolity elsewhere and I'll do my duty when called on. Good day t' you, sir. I've some grave matters in hand and I'm too busy t' pass the time o' day with come-by-chance folk of your ilk." Nor could a stranger say, "Good ol' dog!" and win a fair answer. In response to such greetings Smoke cocked his head and stared; and the cock of his head was too cunning for friendship, and the stare was too sharp and too long to signify a comfortable association for the future. Consequently, when Marsh looked Queer John Tall's team over in the rosy, quiet weather of the next morning, he was aware of Smoke's origin and disposition—aware that though Smoke might serve to the death a man who could command him the old dog would assuredly cherish no friendships.

According to the tales of Queer John Tall, Smoke was born in the timber, back of Jounce Inlet, and bred at Elegant Run, north of Okka, by a huskie called Iksialook. It was said a wolf mothered him. That was likely. A man could easily believe it. A queer gray beast she was, known by the name of Snowflake in the tilts of Jounce Inlet and Elegant Run. She was domesticated in part: she came

and went at will and practiced good behavior at all times; and once she served in the traces, with Iksialook, on the trail from Elegant Run to Red Water, and did well enough, but never would serve again.

It was said that she hankered overmuch for the company of men—that she shamed the pack by haunting the settlements; and the tale went on that she was outcast, in the end, for that self-same reason. Whatever and all about that, she fetched her pup in from the timber, as though intent to have him bred with the dogs of men, and there left him, with Iksialook's pack, like a foundling child, and was never seen again. It was Iksialook that reared the pup; and it was said that Smoke was constant —that he chose to live the life of a dog, like a dog, and would not run in the timber like a half-breed wolf.

Queer John Tall said:

"That's my bully."

"Too old," Marsh complained.

"Good ol' dog!" said Queer John Tall. "He've served me well. I loves un."

Marsh laughed unpleasantly.

"You may love him," said he. "If he has served you as well as all that, I've no doubt you do. But the dog's too old to bully a young pack like yours. He'll fail on the trail. I don't—I don't fancy him at all."

John Tall's eyebrows went up.

"You don't, eh?" said he. "If you don't like my team," he added, "you may leave it."

Marsh withdrew quickly, perturbed:

"I'm content with your team! It will serve. No doubt the old dog——"

"Old as he is," Tall interrupted, mollified, "he've command o' that pack."

"It may be," said Marsh, doubtfully. "Can he maintain command through a pass of hard labor and hunger?"

Tall replied in scorn:

"You don't know my ol' dog."

"A stout way with him—he has it," Marsh admitted. "I don't doubt his power to bully a team along. He's gone past his labor though. His day's near done."

"Hut!" Tall scoffed.

"They'll break the old dog before long," Marsh predicted. "The pack will cast him out and eat him up."

That happened, then, to show the truth of Marsh's words. Marsh nudged Tall to watch the course of it through and learn the lesson it taught. Smoke came close to a black dog of the pack—a taut black beast, somewhat short of his prime, with a heart to rise in the world. It was a pretty play of pride and temper. The hair of Smoke's neck ruffled a bit. There was a slight pause in his walk. If it was in his mind to thrash the black dog then and there for saucy conduct, he thought

better of it: he stalked on; and his walk was too slow for contempt—slow enough for fear and the purpose to hide it.

All the while, the black dog was watchful—watched Smoke near and watched him pass and away; and then he threw back his head, and laughed a dog's laugh, and pawed the ground, and walked off, taking his time and wagging his quarters with satisfaction, to hob-nob with three gray dogs of the pack. What was in the black dog's mind was clear enough: he knew that he was Smoke's master and was content to bide his time; and he knew, too, that the three gray dogs of the pack had seen the play and drawn their own conclusions.

"You see that?" Marsh demanded.

"I did."

"You know what it means?"

"I does," Tall replied; "an' I'm sorry. That black dog's my new leader. Name o' Coal. He's young an' he's brisk. I 'low he've a notion t' bully the pack as well as t' lead it. I got that black dog down at Topsail Island six weeks ago. I had a yellow dog from Rock Harbor t' lead my team that trip. As clever a dog as ever you seed, that Chip was; but he lived by his wits—more by cunnin' than courage—an' one night the pack ate un up. Next mornin' I got that black Coal from ol' Sam Watt. I 'low there isn't a sharper sled-dog on the Labrador. In three days he had the leadin' trace. 'Twas what he had wanted from the first. An' he

earned it, too—jus' worked his ribs lean t' show what he knowed an' what he could do. An' now, ecod, he've made up his mind t' bully the team! 'Tis as plain as day. There'll be no peace on the trail until Smoke has thrashed that notion out o' Coal. Smoke knows it. An' the pack knows it. Did you mark the three gray dogs? They was waitin' t' find out what would happen."

"Are you really fond of Smoke?"

"I is."

"You want to save him alive?"

"I does."

"Don't take him over Poor Luck with short rations of dog-meat in this weather. Better leave him safe at home."

"I will," Tall agreed.

When Queer John Tall called the dogs to the komatik there was a vast to-do of delight. The pack capered and wagged, and pawed the snow, in the way of the Labrador dogs, eager for the traces and the trail. Smoke was grave enough, according to the habit of the wolf that he was: he bit his own trace from the tangle, straightened it out, and sat down beside it to wait with patience on Tall's convenience. Marsh marked that he eyed the pack's antics like an anxious school-master with half a mind to rap the desk and command silence and strict attention to the work in hand.

Sly went in the trace and sat down. Box went

in and sat down. Tucker and Tog went in. Coal went in. By and by all the dogs were in except Whip and Tom and Smoke. Smoke was worried: he kept an eye on Tall, in doubtful surprise, and once in a while picked up his trace to remind Tall that it was his turn to be harnessed; and when Coal went in before him, and Tog and Tucker went in, out of turn, Smoke began to whimper with trouble and fright.

It is hard work and lean rations on the trail, God knows! Yet a Labrador dog cannot endure a slight. When Tall freed Smoke's trace from the komatik and threw it to his lad to stow in the shed, it was plain to Smoke, at last, that he was to be left behind; and he carried on in a way to break a man's heart—he howled like a lost soul, and he rolled in the snow, as a man squirms in grief, and he tugged at Tall's mitt, like a pleading child, and snapped at his boots as if to threaten his life. And all this while Coal and the pack, on their haunches, pop-eyed and frozen stiff with curiosity, kept watch on Tall and Smoke.

It was too much for Tall to withstand. He called back his lad with Smoke's trace.

"'Tis too bad," said he. "I can't bear it."

"You doom your dog," Marsh warned.

"He'll die o' grief an I leaves un behind. I've heared tell o' such things afore. I'm thinkin' this ol' dog chooses t' die in harness. He've served me

well an' I 'low I'll humor his wish. An he must die, let un die as he wills t' die. 'Tis what I'd like myself. Hi, Smoke! Good ol' dog!"

"Very good," Marsh agreed. "Make haste."

"No hurry," said Tall.

Marsh flashed:

"No hurry? God—there's haste too much! And you dawdle like a school-boy!"

Queer John faced Marsh.

"My friend," he admonished, gravely, "that's no way t' talk to a man. I've not fancied you from the first and since you've found fault with my ol' dog I've liked you a deal the less. Leave us understand each other. You is English, no doubt, an' one o' the Company's high servants at the Pepper Tickle Post, as you says. But you'll speak me fair, as one good man to another, or we'll part on the trail, wherever we chances t' be. I'm not t' be trifled with, sir. Mark that!"

"Agreed!" Marsh cried. "For God's sake, put the dog in!"

With that Tall lashed Smoke's trace to the komatik and put the old dog in. Presently thereafter Marsh and Tall were underway in the long trail over Poor Luck from Fool Harbor to Windy Tickle. And Marsh was still yielding to a fixed habit of looking behind.

III

SNOW BLIND

IN the night, on Northeast Barrens, where the gale had caught Rime and Calk, the wind fell away. At dawn there was not a breath astir on the barrens. Topmast was not then visible. The weather was still bitter cold. There was a mist of frost in the air; and it hung like fog: Rime and Calk, waiting for day to clear the air, were white with frost. They were like snow-men: frost formed in the hair of the skins in which they were clad and coated the flesh of their faces.

Still the promise of the dawn was for a fair day. Presently the rosy glow of dawn appeared to the half-blinded men; and soon after that the drab color of the world turned white and the haze of frost began to sparkle as the sun burned its way through to the crust of Northeast Barrens. When the sun was up, the air clear, the sky blue, the snow a glistening white, Rime caught, he fancied, a momentary glimpse of the crest of Topmast.

To an unimpaired vision the clear-cut outline and flashing heights of Topmast would have been instantly conspicuous. But Rime's vision was gravely impaired; and the sun, striking up from the crust,

hurt his eyes and blinded his sight. The momentary glimpse was in the right quarter, however; and Rime and Calk, having eaten of the caribou meat, went forward.

Snow had fallen after the wind went down. The crust was carpeted thick and soft.

"That's queer!" Calk ejaculated abruptly.

Rime stopped.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "What's queer? You startle me, Calk."

"No dogs!"

"Oh, pshaw!" said Rime, relieved. "The dogs is round somewheres. You may lay t' that."

"I don't see none."

"You're too blind t' see."

"I don't hear none."

"The snow's thick underfoot. A dog wouldn't make no sound in snow like this."

Calk was troubled.

"I don't like it," said he. "'Tis too queer t' please me. Where *is* them dogs, Rime?"

"Taggin' behind."

"Is you seed 'em?"

"I can't see fifty fathom," Rime replied. "My eyes was sore with smoke when we started. The snow blinds me now. I wish 'twould cloud up. Dogs?" he added. "I isn't seed a hide or hair. They're lurkin' behind. We isn't goin' t' lose the dogs. An' we'll give Marsh a run for his life afore this chase is over. Don't you fret about that."

Calk laughed harshly.

"It's not Marsh I'm frettin' about," said he. "Not now, Rime. Far from it."

"Oh, come on! We're losin' time."

Calk's anxiety was not to be eased. He whistled to the pack. There was no response. He peered roundabout. No living thing was visible. So inflamed were his eyes, so bright and painful the sun on the snow, that his eyelids were closed to mere quivering slits. His range of definite vision was already not more than fifty yards.

"I can't see!" he complained.

"Save your sight," Rime admonished.

"I've no wish t' waste it," Calk replied tartly. "I wants t' know where them dogs is afore I ventures on. I'm uneasy. A blind man, Rime, is an anxious man. He's all the safer for knowin' all he can find out about what he may expect. I'm fast goin' snow-blind in this sunlight, Rime; an' so is you, fast or slow. If them dogs is taggin' us like a pack o' wolves we ought t' know it an' take precautions. You an' me, Rime," he added with a sage wag of the head, "is the only chance they got on these barrens."

"What you mean, Calk?"

"I means," Calk replied, "that you an' me is the only meat on the barrens."

"Hut!" Rime scoffed.

"There's one thing sure," Calk went on. "If them dogs is hereabouts they're stalkin' us like wild

wolves, or they'd answer my call. They lurk, Rime. They're on dishonest business. An' if they comes near they mustn't find out that our eyes isn't as useful as they usually is. Now you mark what I says, Rime. Don't you let them dogs know that your eyes is refusin' duty. An' I won't neither."

"Calk," said Rime, "I'll tell you where them dogs is. 'Tis a simple matter."

"Where is they, Rime?"

"You know where Joker come from?"

"No, Rime."

"He come from Fool Harbor. He was bred there. The Company's Factor fetched un up the coast in the Fall o' the year. You know, now, Calk, where them dogs is?"

"I does not, Rime."

"Led by Joker," Rime explained, "they've gone on t' Fool Harbor."

Calk laughed again. This time it was a hearty outburst. It diminished in chuckles.

"Sure enough!" said he. "They've got hungry an' gone for grub. That Joker's a wise ol' dog, Rime. I'm at ease. Come on!"

Before noon Rime and Calk were disabled and in agony. The reflected light from the snow, striking into eyes made sore by smoke, was like a flame. It blistered. They stumbled, walking with eyes closed, for the most part—permitting only imperative flashes of the immediate path to enter.

Though the sun was high, the sky blue, the air

dry and clean, the color of the world vivid, the contrasts sharply definite, for Rime and Calk the remoter landscape, even the shining bulk of Topmast, was shrouded in the impenetrable haze of snow-blindness.

Presently detail vanished altogether from the world. Even the next step was vague. The advance was resolute and constant, however, Calk grumbling bitterly all the while, according to his habit of magnifying difficulties in celebration of his own prowess, and Rime, temperamentally disinclined even to admit a disability, declaring that he could see like a hawk.

As a matter of fact, the one was as blind as the other—Rime as blind as Calk, and Calk as blind as Rime. But Rime led the way, admitting no vital handicap; and Calk, in his wake, complained that he could not see to follow his own nose.

Calk depended on Rime for guidance. There was nothing else for him to do. He gave the matter of direction no thought whatsoever, except occasionally to wonder whether they were in the right or the wrong way. As no debate could assist Rime, to whose resources, whatever they were, the responsibility had been committed, no suggestion was offered. Calk whimpered that he was hungry, that he was thirsty, that he was weak, that he was stone-blind—the which, for a time, was the sum of his communications.

Rime, too, was hungry, thirsty, weak, blind.

That he was hungry he admitted lightly, and that he was parched; but that he was weak and blind he denied. As for the direction, he was sure of it, said he, in his confident, boastful way; he had glimpsed Topmast at dawn, said he, and he would lead Calk down Rattle Gully to Fool Harbor at dusk.

And persisting doggedly, the world all the while turning black, they came to a patch of boulders and stunted spruce, midway of the afternoon, which they were too blind to identify and had not sight enough to search.

Seven of these patches of spruce and boulders were scattered over Northeast Barrens.

"Now what's this?" said Calk. "It is Ragged Wood?"

"I hopes 'tis Ragged Wood," Rime replied.

"Does you know that 'tis?"

"No, I doesn't. All I knows is that, accordin' t' my reckonin', it ought t' be Ragged Wood. If my eyes wasn't beginnin' t' bother me a bit I'd be able t' tell for sure."

"I believes 'tis Dwarf Wood," Calk complained.

"If 'tis Dwarf Wood," said Rime, "we're astray for good an' all. But I believes 'tis Ragged Wood. Somehow, it *feels* like Ragged Wood. An' if 'tis Ragged Wood I'll find Rattle Gully easy enough an' we'll be at Fool Harbor afore dark. I was born and bred at Fool Harbor, Calk, an' I knows my way home."

"'Tis Dwarf Wood."

"No, Calk; 'tis not Dwarf Wood. I've not strayed that far from the course."

"It might be Swamp Hole."

"Too much timber."

"How do you know there's timber, Rime?" said Calk. "Dang' if I don't believe you can see as well as you says you can! You're nowheres near so blind as me. I can't see a inch ahead."

"You'd know there was timber," Rime replied, "if you'd feel about an' discover it."

"If 'tisn't Swamp Hole, then, it might be Big Rock."

"Oh, no, Calk! I isn't traveled in a circle. Not by no means, m' lad! 'Tisn't Big Rock."

"It might be Scrub Shelter."

"Look you, Calk!" said Rime in a temper. "It might be Scrub Shelter and it might be Swamp Hole an' it might be Big Rock; but 'tisn't. An' if 'tis or 'tisn't, we got t' believe, jus' the same, that 'tis Ragged Wood an' shape our course accordin'. I believes 'tis Ragged Wood. You better believe so too. I've growed mighty tired o' your whinin', Calk."

"If 'tis Ragged Wood we're near Fool Harbor?"

"We is."

"Well, then, we'll eat the meat in your pocket—what's *left* o' the meat. An' we'll melt some snow an' have a drink. I'm perishin' for water. An' I can strive no longer without food."

Rime had gone rigid and scowling. For a moment he stared blankly at Calk.

"Calk!" said he.

"What's the matter?"

"What you mean jus' then?"

"I didn't mean nothin' out o' the way. I don't know what you're talkin' about."

"The *rest o' the meat,* says you."

"Oh, I didn't mean nothin' by that. Don't be foolish, Rime. You can see better than me. Grub round for some wood. 'Twon't be no trouble for you t' find it. We'll have a fire. Here's the ax. Pass over the meat."

"What you want the meat for?"

"I'll get the meat ready whilst you gather the wood—that's all. Pass it over, Rime."

Rime was silent.

"'Tis a queer thing t' say," said he coldly at last. "There's nothin' t' get ready."

This enraged Calk.

"What you want t' keep it for?" he demanded. "You've had it all day. Now you pass it over!"

"All right, Calk," said Rime.

There was some confusion before Rime's hand came into contact with Calk's and the meat changed custody.

"I thought you could see," said Calk.

"I can see well enough."

"Well, then, you must have been pretendin' jus' now that you couldn't."

To this Rime did not reply.

"I'll get the wood," said he. "Don't drop the meat," he added; "you might lose it in the snow."

"Won't no harm come t' that meat from *me*," Calk retorted.

Rime reflected, scowling.

"Say that again," said he.

Calk flashed:

"I says there won't no harm come t' the meat from *me!*"

Rime observed:

"I didn't say there would."

"No," Calk shouted; "an' 'tis damned lucky for you that you didn't."

"That's brash talk," said Rime. "'Tis almost saucy."

"Damned saucy!"

"A power o' profanity from a Methodist!" Rime sneered.

Calk retorted:

"This here meat is *safe*—with *me!*"

"If you say anything like that again, Calk," Rime began to threaten, "I'll——"

Indignation mastered him. He began to grope for wood.

All this time Rime and Calk both realised that misfortunes which had overtaken them were helping Marsh to increase his lead and in all probability would enable him to slip through their hands. Instead of trapping the fugitive they were them-

selves trapped on the barrens, and would be lucky men to get through to Fool Harbor alive.

Trapped? Yes, but that was not all. They had been stalked as well; seven dogs of the pack had followed the men silently. At first the dogs had hid themselves. The lurking pursuit was significant of a ravenous interest in Rime and Calk. Two of the nine had disappeared: they might have been seized and eaten by the seven in the midst of the gale; they might have escaped to the timber or to Fool Harbor to save themselves from destruction. At any rate, the seven survivors had secretly stalked Rime and Calk all the way from the shelter of the big boulder. They had not ventured near. It was the behavior of wolves rather than of dogs. As a matter of fact, Rime and Calk had released and rebuffed the dogs to their natural state. The dogs were no longer in servitude. They had been given no work; they had been denied food; they had no longer anything in common with the men—nothing to give or receive. They had been cast off. They were free. In this new relation they had acted in concert, like a pack of wolves in patient chase of a dangerous quarry. One man had a whip—the other an ax. The dogs were cowards. They had stepped warily—curious, cautious, patient, keenly alert. Their feet had been silent on the carpet of snow. And they had not been fed for four days.

Rime and Calk had been off guard all day long.

They had caught no indication of the whereabouts of the pack. There had been no sound to alarm them. Had they been aware that the dogs were following—creeping closer all the while, bolder, more eager as the nearer approach was ignored—they would have been concerned and constantly watchful. Having accepted the suggestion that the whole pack had sagaciously scampered off to Fool Harbor for food, however, they had dismissed the menace for good and all. When they came to the patch of spruce, stumbling and fumbling like disabled men, the dogs crept close and sat on their haunches, intent and amazed. By that time the pack was beginning to be surely aware that there was something the matter with the men. It was intensely interesting. Curiosity overcame them. They squirmed a little nearer. Joker even crept within a fathom of Calk and looked him over at leisure. He was not driven away. It was astounding. He crouched. At that moment Calk's voice was raised in anger against Rime. Courage failed the dog. He sat up. The other dogs crept closer. Nothing happened. They crept closer still. And they waited—ready for attack or flight.

Calk stumbled against a boulder. It protruded from the snow and had been swept bare by the wind. He sat down. The caribou meat was still in his hand. He was wroth with Rime. It seemed to him vaguely that Rime had sought to wrong him; and he was famished and weary to such a

degree that he could not recognize his ill temper as nothing more than a symptom of his misery. His eyes were in agony. They were full of needles —a million red-hot needles. He wanted to rub them—to press them with his fingers.

As the sun had warmed the air to a tolerable temperature, he could safely take off his mitts. To do this, however, and to seek to ease his eyes with both hands, he must meantime dispose of the little remnant of caribou meat. Instead of thrusting it into his pocket, he placed it on the bare rock at his side; and having made sure that it would not fall off, he drew off his mitts, put his hands to his aching eyes, and bent forward in an attitude of despondency, his weary, gloomy thoughts elsewhere.

At the same time Rime began to break dry branches from the spruce near by. And presently Calk nodded—and dropped into a momentary doze.

Joker, squatting twelve feet behind Calk, had observed the situation of the mouthful of caribou meat. So, too, had the pack. Joker, however, was nearest. Moreover, he was the bully of the pack, a mighty dog. The privilege of theft was therefore his. When Calk fell asleep, when he was still—when, for some reason or other, he was obviously inattentive—Joker advanced a step, his head low, his king-hairs rising. The pack watched the enterprise with intense interest, their eyes wide, their mouths dripping; but they made no move or sound to interrupt it. Joker advanced delicately. Calk

stirred. Joker fawned, anticipating discovery—dropped his forequarters and wagged his tail. When Calk was still again he stepped swiftly, boldly close. Within reach, with his eyes shifting occasionally to the meat from an alarmed observation of Calk, he thrust his head forward, seized the meat, and withdrew.

There was no sound from the pack. It may be that the dogs yielded to an obligation of silence. Doubtless had the quantity of food been of consequence there would have been a snarling rush for a share of it. But the meat was a mere mouthful. Joker bolted it undisturbed. No more than a minute had sped. Meantime Calk had continued deep in his doze.

Rime gathered wood with his eyes closed. He was as blind as Calk. He suffered the same pain. It was preferable to fumble and stumble. When he opened his eyes, a little painful light entered through the quivering slits; but the objects reflected were confused and misty. It was hardly worth while to endure the pain for the meager advantage of the reward. As Calk, in his weakness and pain, mistrusted Rime, so, too, Rime was indignant and surly in his regard of Calk, both men being feverishly incapable of clear convictions or generosity.

Having gathered his wood and touched a match to it, Rime stood away, brooding. Calk had suspected him—Calk had insinuated an ugly theft and betrayal. Well, Calk had the meat now. What

would Calk do? The man who would suspect Rime might himself rob Rime. Where had the suspicion come from if not from the well of Calk's own thieving inclination? A man was all well enough until misfortune precipitated a life-and-death crisis. No man was to be trusted in a crisis. It was then every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. And if Calk had broken the meat—if Calk tried any of his tricks——

"Calk!" Rime called.

Calk did not stir. He had not slept for two days. His doze was profound.

"Calk!" Rime barked. He was alarmed. "Calk!"

Calk started awake.

"Where is you?" said he, bewildered after this depth of sleep. "I can't see you. I'm black blind."

"Ha! You're there, is you?"

"I been sittin' here asleep."

"Well, I can't see that far. I'm as blind as you. I called you twice. I thought you'd stole away with the meat."

"You'd no call t' think ill o' me."

"The fire's roarin' hot. 'Twould thaw a stone. Fetch the meat over here."

"Jus' a minute."

Calk put his hand where he had placed the remnant of caribou meat. There was no meat! He felt delicately over the surface of the rock. The meat was gone. It could not have fallen off. The rock was broad and flat.

"You're dawdlin'," Rime complained. "Make haste."

"Jus' a minute."

Again Calk passed his hand over the surface of the rock. He searched it completely. There was nothing there.

"Hurry up!" Rime scolded.

Calk thought.

"Rime took it!"

The delay annoyed Rime and stirred his suspicion. What was the matter with Calk? What was he up to? Obviously Calk was playing for time. He was taking advantage of Rime's blindness. He was doing something in secret. Rime's ill-tempered suspicion flared.

"I don't reckon," said he, sneering, "that you could have lost that meat."

Calk replied:

"How long is I been asleep here? I must have slep' wonderful deep. I didn't hear the slightest sound."

"No sound t' hear."

"Is I been asleep long?"

"A matter o' ten minutes."

"Is you had the fire goin' most o' that time?"

"I 'low so. I been standin' here warmin' my hands an' waitin' for the coals. Fetch the meat."

Calk said:

"I isn't got no meat."

"What!" Rime ejaculated.

"Meat's gone."

The quiet, frank disclosure, like the admission of a child whose own fault in the premises is obvious, astounded and silenced Rime. For a time there was no sound except the roar and crackle of the fire. The watchful pack of dogs stirred uneasily. But they made no noise. And presently Rime spoke. He was not violent. He pitied Calk. Calk was of course concealing the meat. He might already have eaten it—taking advantage of Rime's blindness and occupation, he might already have crept to the other side of the fire, thawed the meat, consumed it, pretending now to have been asleep. The probability was, however, that he was concealing the meat—that he would attempt secretly to thaw and eat it.

Well, it was a natural theft. Calk had been misled and overcome by hunger. No invention of lies could divert the accusation from him. He would lie, of course; but the implication was direct and sure: the meat had been in Calk's possession and must still be in his possession for the reason that he could not have been relieved of it. Calk's state was pitiable. He was as witless as an erring, lying child. Rime's wrath was not stirred.

"Speak me fair, Calk, an' I'll not mind," said he. "Did you eat the meat?"

Had Calk been guilty he would have been enraged and loud. Rather, now, he pitied Rime.

He answered, gravely, patiently:

"No, Rime."

"I'd forgive you, Calk."

"I've no need o' forgiveness, Rime. I didn't eat the meat. You knows that, doesn't you?"

"What did you do with it?"

"I put it beside me on the rock. Then I fell asleep. Now 'tis gone."

"What's become of it?"

"I don't know."

"You must know."

"Not if you don't."

"Isn't you got no notion?"

"Well—yes."

"What's your notion?"

"Somebody must have took it whilst I slept."

"Oh, pshaw, Calk!" Rime laughed. "That's a pretty tough yarn. Can't you see that? Why, there hasn't been nobody 'round here t' take it!"

"I don't know about that."

"Who?"

"Well—somebody."

"Name un."

Calk said, deliberately:

"*You,* Rime!"

Still Rime was not angered. The charge was too preposterously an expedient of Calk's to save himself from blame. It could not be taken seriously.

"Oh, pshaw!" Rime laughed again.

"You can see well enough," Calk accused. "You've been able t' see all day. You've said so."

"I'm as blind as you."

"No, you isn't, Rime!"

"I'm tellin' the truth."

"'Tis *not* the truth."

"Oh, pshaw!"

Calk rose.

"If I can find you, Rime," said he, "I'm comin' over t' where you is. Don't move."

"I won't budge. What you want o' me?"

"I wants my share o' that meat."

"Ye thievin' dog!" Rime roared. "Come within reach o' my hands an' I'll strangle ye!"

Calk's stumbling advance toward Rime was watched with intense inquiring interest by the seven ravenous dogs. They stood tense, with heads low, staring. When Calk fell they quivered. Whatever their suspicion, however, they were not yet sure of Calk's incapacity. Calk recovered and stumbled on. The dogs advanced a few paces. There was something the matter with the man. What was it? He was not himself. He seemed to be sick. His power had diminished. Could he defend himself? Probably not. He had nothing in his hand. The pack crept noiselessly nearer. Obviously the man was not aware of their presence. Otherwise he would not have tolerated an inimical approach. He would have turned to berate and drive the dogs off.

They were safe, then—they could creep closer still. And they did—in a tense, bristling pack; and when Calk halted, not sure of his direction through

"All taut for the leap and the onset."

the brief remaining interval, the dogs halted, too, and crouched, all taut for the leap and the onset. It was Calk's voice that delayed the attack. The dogs waited. The voice might portend an unperceived danger. It was better to wait a moment.

"Where is you?" said Calk to Rime.

"I'm here. I'm waitin'."

Calk changed his direction to the location of Rime's defiant voice. He groped forward.

"I'll find you, Rime," said he.

"I'm waitin'."

A moment later Calk's outstretched hands touched Rime. The men locked arms.

"I wants my share!" Calk demanded.

"I isn't got the meat, ye fool!"

"Ye lie!"

"For that," Rime vowed, "I'll throttle ye!"

Calk's grip subsided abruptly. He exclaimed:

"Hist!"

They listened.

"What's that, Rime? You hear anything?"

"I don't know. I——"

"Hist!"

They listened again. They released each other. Turning, then, in the direction of their suspicion, they confronted the pack. They saw nothing. They were blind.

"There! Hear that?"

"'Twas a growl!"

"I tells you, Rime," Calk whispered, breathless,

"there's dogs around here. They're in front of us."

"We've been stalked all day."

"They're crouched."

"Grope around for the ax. Quick! 'Tis somewheres near my feet. If you can't find it, seize an ember from the fire. I've my whip in my belt. Quick, now!"

Calk found the ax.

"You got it?"

"Ay."

"Now!" said Rime.

Both roared at the pack they could not see. Calk brandished the ax. Rime shot the lash of the whip forward. It found its dog. There was a yelp.

"Ha!" Rime gasped. "That was Joker!"

"Mercy o' God!" Calk exclaimed. "'Twas a narrow squeak, Rime. They was ready."

"They're still ready."

"We're lost."

"Not yet. We can stand un off for a while. Face un, Calk. An' keep the ax ready."

By and by Calk said:

"I reckon it must have been a dog that stole that meat, Rime."

"I'm glad of it, Calk."

"Me too."

Then——

"We better stand back t' back," said Rime. "We got a long time t' wait. God knows how long!"

They waited.

When the two missing dogs of the pack arrived alone and famished at Fool Harbor, there was instant consternation among the folk of the place. Where were the other dogs? Within half an hour, two men with Marsh's recuperated team and a komatik were striving up Rattle Gully to Northeast Barrens. Before dusk they had searched the nearer reaches and pushed out to the midst of the barrens. The smoke of Rime's expiring fire drew them to Ragged Wood, where Calk and Rime were standing siege, back to back, both temporarily as blind as bats.

"Whistle up the dogs," said Rime. "We got t' get this here pack t' Fool Harbor somehow. Then we've got t' get that fellow Marsh."

And when they learned from their rescuers that during the time of their miserable snow-blindness on the barrens Marsh had left Fool Harbor—headed due south, behind John Tall's spanking team of huskies—two madder men than Rime and Calk could not be found on the Labrador coast. With such a lead as Marsh had no time could be lost in getting after him. But the hard luck which had followed the two stuck by them; before their eyes were fit for the road they found themselves storm

bound at Fool Harbor by a gale which swept the barrens to the south, filled the gullies with drifts and blotted out the trail. All Rime and Calk could do was to remain in shelter, gnawing their beards with impatient anger and consoling themselves only with the thought that somewhere to the south Marsh, too, must be snowed in.

IV

HUSKIE DOGS

OUT of Fool Harbor, John Tall told Marsh how fond he had grown of Smoke in their years on the trail together, as fond as a comrade; and he told him why he owed the old dog an age of ease and security and fullness. They had been through some tight pinches, it was plain—a gale of snow this side of Tall Old Man, for one thing, and a ticklish time in black weather on the soft ice of Schooner Bay; and John Tall allowed he would not be trudging the trail from Fool Harbor to Windy Tickle that day if it had not been for old Smoke's courage and common sense and faithfulness in service.

"Smoke's a wolf," Tall said, "an' won't slobber his friendship—he lives to hisself an' is grave an' proud; an' though 'tis true that neither a wolf nor a dog should be trusted by any wise man, bein' all thieves an' liars an' murderers, Smoke is as good as the best, if not better. Anyhow I've snuggled up t' Smoke, many a frosty night in the open, an' been glad an' warm in his company; an' Smoke has served me well, ecod!—an' Smoke shall be served

well in his turn, if I could manage t' serve un. As for the trip t' Windy Tickle—I'll deal with the dog that troubles ol' Smoke!"

It went well enough for two days. It was clear blue weather and good going. The snow was hard and the barrens trail was swept clean by past winds. Marsh and Tall sped along. Smoke bullied the team without fear or favor. It was his to keep the dogs at work and in order; and this he did with no labor that could be seen. Whip was lazy and Tucker was playful and careless: aside from that the pack was content with the trail; and as for Whip and Tucker, Smoke managed them both—snapping at the heels of Whip, when his trace fell slack, and nipping Tucker's flanks as need came to stop his frisking. At night the pack curled up and went to sleep.

"After all," said Marsh to himself, "there is nothing in the wind."

In the lead by day, Coal ran true. Smoke let him alone. There was no cause to do otherwise. Tall allowed then that the old dog still had the mastery and would come through the trip safe and sound; and he would travel no more with the full pack that season. When winter fell again, he would not put Smoke in the trace at all, lest he be whipped and outcast, in the way of fallen bullies, but would keep him for friendship and give him an easy old age in return for service.

"Smoke's master," said Tall.

"True so far," responded Marsh, "but he's calling no attention to the fact, and I don't like that about it."

"Why not?"

"He has no wish for trouble."

"No trouble t' wish for. The pack's runnin' like a clock. 'Twould be a poor bully that wouldn't let well enough alone."

"He's letting Coal alone."

"Coal's wary."

"I'm not so sure," said Marsh, "that Coal isn't just waiting."

Next day, after a snarling night, the dogs ran at odds and were restless. They whimpered and sniffed and back-bit.

" 'Tis plain that somethin' is wrong," Tall said. "Seems to me that the team knows more than we know—that every dog o' the pack is in the secret o' the thing an' out o' patience with waitin'."

Trudging behind the komatik, ill-tempered with tangled traces and abstraction from duty, Tall flecked ears and flanks in aid of Smoke's authority. Before the komatik hauled down Bald Rock and drove into the deeper snow of the scrub growth, Smoke had mastered the uneasiness of the pack and reduced the disorder. After that, the day went well. In the broken wake of the komatik, Tall had nothing to do but shout directions to Coal and take his ease on the trail. Still it was somehow plain that trouble was brewing.

"From what I know about dogs," said Marsh, "I reckon that Coal has been boasting in the night and he expects to make good the boasts before night falls again."

Marsh was right. Beyond Lonesome Wood, where the trail enters the last sad reaches of Poor Luck Barrens, something happened to Smoke.

It had been a hard day for the old dog. It was doubtless an anxious day too. Smoke had been savage and irritable. In all the years of his service with Tall, from his youth to the decline of his prime, it was doubtful if he had bullied the team as he had bullied it that day. It was choleric behavior—quick wrath and a nagging determination. No lagging, no stupidity, no shirking, no scuffling in harness: Smoke would tolerate none of it that day. And he had made his threats good—he had bitten home. There were clots of blood on the haunches of Box and Sly, Tucker was limping, Whip was in a funk, Tom was frantic, and the heels and flanks of the whole team, except Coal, who was too wary to be caught, were in a state of shrink and shiver. It is probable that Smoke provoked what happened. It may be that he saw the clamor rising against him and strove to keep it down. Anyhow, all at once, just beyond Lonesome Wood, led by Coal, the pack leaped on Smoke and fairly smothered him.

There was no time to lose. Smoke was screaming for help. The pack was after his life.

"Lend a hand for a rescue!" cried Tall.

"Go ahead! I'm with you," replied Marsh.

It was already snowing. The day had turned gray. For an hour or more the wind had been whipping down from the northwest. The men had talked of big snow. It was in their minds to make Boulder Hollow, where lay a trapper's tilt, for shelter, if the weather blew cold and thick. To be caught on Poor Luck Barrens in a blizzard was not at all to their taste. It is a wide, naked place—flat to the wind and ill-furnished with the means of protection. Tall went into the scramble with the butt of his walrus whip and Marsh with his bare hands. They brought Smoke out before the pack had done for him—bleeding and coughing and gone mad with fear and rage.

Tall punished the pack, then, with Smoke standing by, all in a bristle and growl. It was a bitter measure he dealt out. The dogs slunk and howled under the whip. When Queer John had done, the traces unsnarled, and the team straightened out, Coal stood waiting for the word, while old Smoke, face to face with his task again, was shivering in his place. The day had grown dull, the wind had begun to bite, and the snow, promising a mighty fall, was thick enough to blind a man. As they pushed on toward Boulder Hollow, it was plain that Smoke was an easy bully.

"They've broke him," said Marsh.

"Not yet," returned Tall. "They had no time."

"He has no longer any spirit."

"Isn't no occasion t' show none," said Tall. "'Team's runnin' smooth enough t' please any bully. Wouldn't ask a bully t' make trouble at a time like this, would you? I tells you we're in for a big snow. An' the dogs knows it, too. 'Tis no time for private quarrels jus' now."

True enough. They were in for a big snow. The dogs knew it as well as the men. They strove. A bully had nothing to do but his own share of the labor of the trail. That Smoke did—that they all did. There wasn't a slack trace to be seen. It just seemed as if the pack knew all about the tilt in Boulder Hollow and were bound to haul it down before night caught them all helpless on the barrens. Truly it was no time for private quarrels. They were all in a mess together—dogs and men. What with traveling light and on short rations, the night coming down on the run, the gale blowing cold as the winds of hell, the snow frosty and thick, and the weather on a long rampage, it would be an evil thing to be caught shelterless and snowed in.

Tall kept a good heart but in spite of his denial to Marsh he fancied that the spirit of Smoke was nearly broken, and wondered, at times, what the old dog thought of it all—what fate he foresaw, and what measures he plotted to fend off his downfall. To be sure, John knew well enough the state of a broken bully. A broken bully is outcast. Not

a pup of the pack but disdains and bully-rags him at will.

"Poor ol' dog!" he said at length.

"Yes," answered Marsh. "You may well say 'Poor old dog!' "

"His head's hangin', Marsh."

"He's feeling pretty bad, that's a sure thing."

"I 'low he knows what's comin'."

"He *must* know. He's no fool. He knows what's coming right enough."

"They've it in mind t' finish un off, Marsh."

"Probably."

" 'Twill be done the night, Marsh, an' Smoke knows it."

"Not to-night," returned Marsh. "That is, if you keep him in the tilt all night."

When Queer John Tall and Marsh made Boulder Hollow, it was nearly dark. A wild gale was blowing down from the northwest. It was a mean tilt, too—abandoned that season, and fallen to wreck. There was a gap in the roof and the logs were awry; yet it would soon be drifted over and tight with snow. It was furnished with wood and a rusty bogie-stove, and was shelter enough for storm-bound folk. Marsh, indeed, was not so much irritated by these poor quarters as he was terrified by the prospect of a long delay. Through his guilty mind galloped a constant image of the angry men on his trail, and it was only his conviction

that Rime and Calk would be snow-bound at Fool Harbor, or not far from it, that kept his panic from betraying him to his already suspicious companion. Tall freed the dogs from their traces. Being worn, they dug themselves holes in the snow, to dodge the wind, and curled up to rest until Tall would throw them their frozen fish. Marsh went within to set the fire; and presently, having no match, called to Queer John. And the men talked for a spell, then waited for the blaze, warmed their hands, and thawed the icicles from their beards. Presently Marsh went out to strip the komatik, for it looked as if the gale would blow thick and long—days of wind and snow, it might be, and they had the notion to stow themselves away and be as safe and cozy as they could while the storm raged. Marsh came back—on the jump; and if a man can tell colors by candle-end and the red light of a fire, Tall could see that he had gone white.

"You brought in the grub-bag?" asked Marsh.

"Me? No."

"Oh, yes, you did, Tall."

"I did not."

"You *must* have," Marsh insisted. "Surely, you've just forgot for a minute. It's in here somewheres."

"No," answered Tall. "'Tis on the komatik."

"It isn't on the komatik."

"Then the dogs have it."

"God!" cried Marsh. "What'll we do now?"

The dogs had the food-bag. There was no doubt about that. It was gone. They had the dog-meat, too. And were fled. Coal, Whip, Sly—the whole pack. Not a hair of them showing in the snow and dark; nor in the wind that was blowing could a sound be caught to indicate their whereabouts. Smoke was gone with the rest; and it seemed to Tall that he must have known the fate in store for him when he followed the pack. He was a wolf —he knew the customs of the pack in a pass like that. He had practiced them with his own teeth and heart—tearing the weak and the old to shreds.

For four days the wind blew a blizzard. It was wild, and thick, and bitter cold. To travel the barrens in a choking gale like that, was out of the question altogether. Marsh knew it, but the knowledge did not keep him from thinking sometimes that somehow, somewhere on the snow-mantled trail to the north, Rime and Calk were pushing after him. And yet his better judgment told him that such a feat was impossible, that on such a trail a man couldn't pick his way in the blinding stifle of snow, nor live in the frosty wind. He could only gasp and stumble and stray.

Tall and Marsh starved. It was painful at first, but presently the first pangs of it passed. Then they turned weak and dull and captious. Queer John began to feel that he hated Marsh, and fell foul of him sadly, too, because Marsh praised fried

pork above a stout mess of fish and hard-bread. It came near a mortal quarrel, for Marsh was an obstinate man. He'd have his pork, he said, no matter what happened, and Tall might talk as he liked about fish, and be damned to him! With his lean, gray countenance, his eyes sparking from vast sockets, turned purple and black, like bruises, as he searched that mean tilt for crumbs and foul scraps, as eager as a beast, Marsh was truly savage. So was Tall. It was no wonder at all that the one soured and irritated the other.

Sometimes the snow thinned and the wind paused. Scraping the frost from the windows, they could peep into the outer world. But ever the wind blew up again, to take the heart out of them, and the snow came swirling down. Sometimes they caught sight of a dog near by—but not often—Coal or Whip or Box; and once Tall stepped without to whistle up Sly, and once to wheedle Tom within reach. But he failed. The dogs were wary. John whistled and wheedled only to waste his breath and spoil his temper. Marsh waited, his mouth watering, and the pack knew the purpose he had in mind. They would eat Marsh if they could get him, just as Marsh would eat them, and their purpose fathered their fear. And Queer John kept on laboring to lay hands on a dog. He would come in from the frost in despair, fairly licking his lips. Once, he sat down and cried like a baby because he couldn't manage to lure one of his own dogs

to the tilt where it could be dispatched in safety. Coal they saw and tried for, and for Box, Sly, Whip and Tom. But they caught no glimpse of Smoke.

"They've done for Smoke," said Marsh.

"Ay," answered John. "Poor ol' dog! He'd be the first t' go. I wish I'd left un t' home. Poor ol' dog! 'Twasn't right t' fetch un along."

It was a vastly gloomy outlook, full of peril and misery. The two men were half dead and weak as water with need of food, snowed-in, prisoners of wind and frost. It was two days to Windy Tickle. Strong men might make it in less; but when slack and fevered with starvation could breast the wind and flounder through the drifts never at all.

It was meat they needed. They talked about meat—dog meat. Their mouths ran water and their hearts beat fast when a howl that was not the wind on the barrens drifted past with the gale. Tall crawled out, once, before the dusk was thick, and tempted Coal. He stood up and stumbled and lay prone and still to deceive him; but the dog was too wary to come near his hand, and presently the frost drove him in. Then Marsh tried, crawling out on hands and knees, with the mind to strangle Coal, waiting for him to come sniffing up. For in the desperate pass he had come to, Marsh was willing that Coal should eat him, or he should eat Coal, and so make an end of the whole business.

But all his efforts failed. Coal was wary; and Marsh came back again in despair.

After dark, Marsh said, "Do you hear anything, Tall?"

"I hears the wind," answered John.

"No—not the wind. Don't you hear something else?"

"I don't think so, Marsh."

"There!"

"A squeak?" queried Tall.

"No, no! More like a whimper."

"I hears it now," said Tall. "That's scratchin'. There's a dog at the door."

There was a dog whimpering and scratching for shelter. Tall opened to him and Smoke came in from the gale. He didn't say much—just wagged a word of thanks; then he stumbled to the fire and lay down, as if he were in his own kitchen, and began to bite the ice from his feet and lick his wounds. The pack had been too much for the old dog. He was sorely wounded—all torn about the throat and legs and haunches. The blood thawed in the heat of the fire, and as he bit the frozen clots away, the raw wounds began to flow. It was plain that the battle had been terrible.

Queer John reckoned that the old dog had thought it all over, out in the snow, hiding away from the pack and had made up his mind to shelter with the men as his only chance. Marsh thought so too,

and said that old Smoke was a whipped bully, outcast, in fear, with his spirit broken at last.

"'Tis a queer thing, though, an' not at all like Smoke, t' slink away t' humans for safety, rather than lose his life in fight, him bein' the son of a wolf, an' born in the timber," mused Tall.

The pangs of hunger came back on Tall and Marsh. Both were weak and shaking.

"You'll have to do it," said Marsh suddenly. "I'm not strong enough."

"Do what?"

"Get the ax."

"What for?" queried Tall.

"It's around here somewhere."

"Here 'tis, Marsh. What do you want me t' do with it?"

"Do with it!" burst out Marsh. "God's sake, man! I want you to kill that dog!"

"I isn't goin' t' kill that dog."

"You'll have to. I'm too weak to wield the ax."

"Leave the ax lie."

"Take it up, man! And get behind him. He'll fight like a wild beast if he sees you lift it to strike!" Marsh cried.

"I isn't goin' t' strike," returned Tall quietly.

"Are you gone mad?" asked Marsh.

"I won't kill that dog. He've trusted me."

"Then I will."

"Oh, no, you won't, Marsh!"

Marsh picked up the ax.

"Smoke!" said Tall.

Smoke jumped up—turned and caught Marsh with the ax in his hand. He bristled and snarled.

"Put that ax down," says Tall. "You can't best the two of us."

Smoke was creeping for the leap.

"Back, Smoke!" cried Tall.

"What are you going to do?" inquired Marsh.

"What I isn't goin' t' do is kill a dog that trusts me," answered John; "an' what I is goin' t' do is get that damned Coal in the mornin'. Jus' you leave it t' me, Marsh, an' you'll have nothin' t' be sorry for afterward. Go t' sleep—jus' lie down an' curl up with an easy mind. Your breakfast will be ready soon after dawn."

"I want my breakfast now," said Marsh doggedly.

"You can't have it now. Jus' oblige me, Marsh, by bein' content t' dream about it," responded Queer John quietly. "'Twill be ready in the mornin'. That I promise. An' if you doesn't breakfast off Coal, you'll breakfast off——"

That was all he said. Marsh knew he meant Smoke.

Queer John Tall had to do it alone. A dog would take fright at the two of them. Yet Tall was weak for the battle—too weak to master a dog single-handed with his bare hands; and bare-handed the battle must be—no dog would come near a man with a club. When dawn broke, and John stood

"You can't beat the two of us!"

ready with a knife in his belt, Coal was alone in the offing. It was not yet broad light, but clear enough for fighting—the snow gone and the wind fallen. Tall was none too sure of himself—he was terribly weak and poor-spirited. He told Marsh to wait within with the ax and sally forth in haste when he had come to grips with Coal. All this being arranged, Tall called to Smoke from beyond the threshold of the tilt; but the old dog was loath to venture—he just whimpered and wagged his tail and seemed to say, "Ah, no, I don't want to!" until Queer John came in and gave him a pat or two and showed him Coal and whispered "Ss-ss-ss-sic un, ol' dog!" Then Smoke stepped outside with his king-hairs on end, his head low and his teeth bare.

"You think he understands?" said Tall.

"I don't know," said Marsh; "but he'll act that way, anyhow, an' that's the same thing in the end."

Smoke looked back.

"See that?" asked Tall.

"Ay."

"He's waitin' for me."

"Go on, then," said Marsh.

"I wish I wasn't so weak," complained Tall. "That Coal is a mighty strong beast."

Queer John was afraid.

"Call the dog back," said Marsh.

"No."

"I'll kill him myself."

"'Twouldn't be fair. No. I'll chance it."

"But——"

"No, no, Marsh. He trusted me. I can't do it."

Tall went out. When Smoke had made sure of that he went on toward Coal. Probably the old dog did not know Queer John's plan, as a man might know it, or act with a man's reason. But he behaved just as well as if he did. It was not surprising, for he was a wolf, born in the timber, and must have known all about stalking a quarry with cunning. Anyhow, once he was sure that Tall was behind to support him, he crept toward Coal and taunted him to battle. Coal backed away—playing his own game, trying to lure Smoke away from the tilt. But Smoke kept creeping nearer, all the while snapping and snarling. At last, when he was fairly close to Coal, he crept on without a sound. Coal seemed to forget about Tall, who was pretty far behind anyhow. Marsh fancied that Smoke would have all he could manage to save himself from death until Queer John could join the fight. He had no sooner made up his mind to this than Smoke rushed, and the battle was on, with Tall, gone almost helpless with weakness and excitement, crawling on hands and knees through the snow.

Then Marsh was suddenly aware of other fighters. Out of the dim half-light of the early dawn sprang three forms, gaunt and gray and ravenous as wolves, three other dogs of the pack, Whip and Sly and Tucker. And in the guilty heart of John

Marsh there throbbed a hideous temptation. Five dogs and a man in a fight to the death. Why need he join the battle? After it was over, there would be meat and to spare, and he could find his way to Windy Tickle without John Tall. But the very selfishness which made him hesitate urged him further. *Would* there be any meat? It was more probable that only Smoke and his master would be killed and eaten and that Marsh would find himself alone against a strong pack. And what would his chances be then? Even if he did escape, there might come a time when he would be called upon to explain the disappearance of his companion, and this, he realized, would not be an easy thing for a blood-guilty man to do. No; his only hope lay in joining with Tall and Smoke against the others.

"Look out," he shouted to Tall; "the pack is coming."

Tall did not seem to hear. Then Marsh made for the scramble; and what had happened to Tall happened to him—his legs gave way with the excitement of the thing, and he had to crawl on hands and knees, cumbered by the ax. When he got to Tall, Coal had John by the shoulder, and Smoke had Coal by the throat, while Tall's knife had just slipped between Coal's ribs. Tucker and Whip and Sly were atop of the three, searching for vital parts. Then Marsh stood up, with the last strength he had, and lifted his ax, half blind with weakness, and chanced the death of Tall.

More by luck than good aim, he brained Tucker with the first blow and broke Sly's back with the second. Then he could do no more. He fell down in the snow—done. When he sat up and looked around again, Whip was gone, and Queer John was sitting up, too, staring like a daft man, while old Smoke, on his haunches, was watching the two of them, just as if he were wondering what the devil was the matter, and hoped that nothing had occurred that anybody would be inclined to blame him for.

Tall was hurt.

"In this cold weather," he remarked cheerfully, "it won't matter much. I'm all right."

"You got Coal," said Marsh.

"An' you got Tucker an' Sly," returned Tall. "We're well provided for, Marsh. 'Twon't be no trouble t' make Windy Tickle on these strong rations."

They looked at the dogs.

"Which do you prefer?" asked Marsh.

"I jus' hates that damned Coal so bitter," answered Queer John, "that I won't even eat un!" Then he turned to Smoke. "Good ol' dog!" he said. "I reckon you'll live in ol' age an' honor, an' take your ease after all."

Two days later, Marsh and Queer John Tall limped into Windy Tickle. They were pretty well used up by their strenuous journey, but a long

night's rest put both men to rights again. All that remained of Tall's team of dogs was old Smoke. He was, therefore, of no further use to Marsh; and in any event he had only bargained with Queer John to get him into Windy Tickle. This having been accomplished, Tall proposed to rest up a day or so before returning to Fool Harbor.

But with the return of Marsh's physical strength there came back stronger than ever the panic fear of pursuit. On the painful tramp from Boulder Hollow to the shelter of Windy Tickle his eyes had constantly sought the trail to the north, and his fevered imagination had pictured the relentless Rime and Calk dogging his steps. Leaving Queer John to his own devices, now that he had no further use for him, Marsh bought a new team, reoutfitted, being careful to take a gun this time, and with the flanks of the huskies quivering under his furious lash he raced on over the barren reaches of the coast headed for Walk Harbor, far to the south.

V

THE STRANGER AT PEEP COVE

AT that hour of a mid-winter Labrador night, with the moon obscured and half a gale of wind blowing in from the frozen reaches of the sea, a knock at the door was a shocking incident, like an alarm of disaster, sounding sudden and loud. There was a knock at the door at Peep Cove of Smokestack Arm, near by Bare Cape and the Hen-an'-Chickens—Trapper Thomas Cuff's tilt, a tight log shanty, calked with caribou moss, the roof of turf, the whole buried in a great drift of snow. It was the only door between the cluster of cottages at Windy Tickle and the Hudson's Bay Company Post at Walk Harbor; and Walk Harbor lay seventy white miles to the south, as a man might travel the coast, skirting the rugged shore of Smokestack Arm, and Windy Tickle was distant forty miles of deep, bleak trail to the north. It was an honest coast: there was no law in visible operation—small need of the law on a coast as simple-lived and amiable; but Trapper Tom's youngsters, their game of tit-tat-toe interrupted by a rapid, violent knocking at the door, were never-

theless brought up all standing, as the sea phrase goes, and were too completely convulsed with amazement and fright to bid the stranger come in from the frosty misery of that blustering night.

"Hark!"

"What's that?"

"Hist!"

The stranger stamped in without waiting to be bidden. He was clad in deer-skin, white with frost, and dusted with the dry snow of the trail to his middle; and his breath had frozen in his beard and eye-brows, and the sweat of his labor and haste had run from beneath his hood, so that a fringe of icicles depended from brows and hood and his beard was a vast icicle of itself. As he opened the door, the snarling of his dogs, which he had already released from the traces and fed, intruded the length of the tunnel with him, having been previously swept away with the wind; and the growl and yelp of the pack was mixed with the uneasy howls of Trapper Tom's dogs, shut up in the shed. He was a formidable man—not so much his brusque speech in salutation and scowling habit of countenance as his sullen abstraction from the incidents of his welcome. When, however, he had brushed himself clean, which he did without saying another word, and when he had picked the icicles from his brows and thawed out his beard, his grim anxious manner lightened; and the little Cuffs—David and Jonathan and Mary—were reassured by the ghost of a

twinkle in his eye and the thin semblance of a heartier note in his voice. By the time they had spread the table, their timidity had vanished altogether, and they were glowing with interest and delight.

"Where's your ma?" said the stranger.

Thus directly addressed by a stranger for the first time since the fall of the year, little Mary Cuff flushed and smiled.

"Ma'th dead," she lisped.

"Where's your pa?"

It was David, the older brother, that replied.

"Pa's trappin'," said he.

The stranger was interested.

"You don't mean to tell me," he protested, "that you three kiddies are all alone here!"

"Yes, sir."

"How long have you been alone?"

"Pa's been in the timber back o' Ribbon Hills for more'n a month. He's lookin' for another silver fox, sir, an' we're livin' in hope that he traps it."

"Another silver fox!" the stranger exclaimed. "Then he's trapped one already?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it here?"

"He fetched it out, sir, for safe-keepin'. I'll show it to you, sir, when you've fed your fill. 'Tis the best furred skin my father ever seed in his life. We're 'lowin' t' make our fortune out of it an' move back t' my father's home-harbor in New-

f'un'land. My father 'lows t' buy a schooner an' come down the Labrador in summer weather. Me an' Jonathan an' Mary is all goin' t' school. My father holds that Jonathan haves enough cunnin' an' spirit t' make a scholar if he sticks at it. An' I 'low my father's right. There isn't nobody in this world can down Jonathan when he've the will t' triumph. An' he'll stick at nothin' t' gain his ends, the spunky little beggar! 'Tis a hard fate, now, sir, that any man has who crosses his will or balks his purpose."

Jonathan grinned.

"How old are you?" the stranger inquired.

"I'm 'leven, I'm told," Jonathan answered, "an' I've no cause t' doubt it."

"Then," said the stranger to Mary, "you're thirteen?"

"Twelve, sir."

"As for me," David put in, "I'm fourteen an' an able lad for my years. We're not so very old," he added, confidently, "but we're able t' fend ourselves in any weather."

"Ay," agreed the stranger, genially; "you look it."

"We got plenty o' grub an' fire-wood," said David; "an' we've nothin' but sickness t' fear."

"You're safe enough."

"That's what pa says. Pa says there's no evil abroad on the coast t' make a man alarmed. 'Tis not like some lands that he've sailed to in his time.

There's places in the world, sir, where a man needs a gun by his side t' fend off evil men that would rob him of all that he had an' think nothin' whatsoever o' the wicked deed. My father has been in such places."

"I'd kill any man that tried t' rob me," Jonathan put in.

The stranger stared at the boastful little boy in a sudden mood of gloomy reflection. Presently he shook himself and smiled.

"How many men, my son," he inquired, "have you killed already?"

"I isn't killed none as yet," Jonathan replied, promptly. "That's not sayin' I wouldn't though."

"You'd not shoot a man down!"

"That I would!" Jonathan insisted. "I'd shoot any man that robbed me if I had a gun."

"In cold blood?"

"Without a pang."

"Ah, well," said the stranger, "you've no need of a gun here."

"No, sir," David agreed. "That's jus' exactly what pa says. There's nothin' t' kill hereabouts. An' we've grub enough t' last the winter through anyhow. My father wouldn't leave us all alone in a sad pass o' need."

"He left you no gun?"

Jonathan answered quickly:

"Oh, we got a gun!"

At that both David and Mary burst out laughing.

"'Tis above the door, sir," said David. "See for yourself."

The stranger laughed too.

"An old-timer!" said he.

"'Tis six feet long, lackin' an inch," David said, an' it haves a bar'l like a cannon. 'Tis my grandfather's sealin' gun. My father brought it from Newf'un'land."

"Loaded?"

"No, sir."

"We got half a cask o' powder," said Jonathan.

"Lead?"

"No, sir," David replied.

"No need o' lead," said Jonathan. "That there gun will shoot anything a man haves the courage t' put in it. 'Twould shoot a hand-spike an' never complain o' the labor. I wish I had the chance t' try."

"That gun, my son," the stranger declared, "would kick you clear to the moon."

"I'd never be fool enough," Jonathan replied, "t' shoot from the shoulder."

By this time the stranger had explained himself and his errand on the mid-winter trail, so that there was no mystery about him in so far as the little innocent Cuffs could apprehend; and his gossip of the coast, as he sipped his tea and bolted his bread and salt fish like a wolf, had rendered him an object of deep interest to the three lonely little folk whose guest he was. His name was Black, he said. He was from the Post at Pepper Tickle,

one of the Company's hands, bound out with dispatches of such importance to the Company's interests that he must travel in mad haste all the way to Quebec, wearing his teams to death, if need be, and procuring new dogs as he was able; and though his dogs were tired and himself muscle-sick with the first labor of the trail, he would be off at dawn—he would even be gone before that if the moon broke out—bound for Walk Harbor. Wiser ears and eyes than the three little Cuffs' credulous ears and eyes would have detected uneasiness in the pace and boisterous quality of the stranger's merriment, a suspicious anxiety in the sudden twitch of his brows and in the occasional grim twist of his lips, wherein his big teeth flashed through his beard; and as to the man's fever of haste, the inference of a cunning mind would have been that he was in flight.

Presently he asked abruptly, his face drawn, all at once, with anxiety, and his voice crisp and grave:

"There'll be no trouble crossing Smokestack Arm in the morning, will there?"

"Man!" David exclaimed. "Did you not feel the wind when you come in?"

"Blowing hard."

"'Tis blowin' almost a gale from the sou'east. 'Tis rushin' up the Arm between the hills. Afore mornin' the ice will be in fragments. You'll never be able t' cross. I doubt that a man could beat his

dogs into humor t' leave the coast. You'll have t' travel the 'longshore trail, sir."

"I've no time."

"'Tis but a day longer at most."

"A day! I can't waste it! I'll try the ice and make the best of a bad job."

David shook his head.

"You may think you'll try it, sir," said he; "but when you sees the ice heavin' in the big swells you'll change your mind an' be content with the 'longshore trail. I've lived beside Smokestack Arm almost all my life, sir, an' I knows what a pother she can kick up in a sou'east gale o' wind. 'Twill be three days an' two nights afore you drives into Walk Harbor."

The stranger having been fed full at last, Jonathan charged the stove with wood, and Mary cleared the table, and David fetched the fox skin from the locker for the stranger's inspection. A rare skin it was—enormous, unblemished, furred thick, glossy, sprinkled with color as with a dust of frost; and its value was patent. Discreetly bargained with, it would fetch seven hundred dollars on the coast; and having passed through many hands, its price leaping with every change, it would be sold in the London auction rooms for fifteen hundred dollars and might eventually adorn a lady at a final expenditure of a thousand more. David Cuff fondled the great skin, and Jonathan patted

it, and Mary stroked it, and the stranger stared at it, brooding; and when the beginnings of its romantic history had been disclosed—since a romantic life it must live thereafter, like a great jewel, moving swiftly from that bleak, impoverished coast to the shoulders of a lady in circles both rich and noble—when the location of the trap had been described, and Trapper Tom's surprise and joy, and the astonishment of the little Cuffs, it was time to turn in.

David restored the skin to the locker and dropped the lid with satisfaction.

" 'Tis safe there," said he.

" 'Tis safe anywhere," said the stranger. "There's nobody would be mean enough to steal it from you."

David laughed.

"Mean enough or not," he replied, "there's nobody near enough t' steal it. You is the first traveler, sir, t' pass this way the whole winter long. I isn't afeared of a thief, sir, where no thieves is. I'm afeared o' the dogs. They'll eat anything. My father left the skin in my charge, sir, an' 'tis worth such a wonderful fortune o' money that there's times when I'm timid."

"My charge, too," Jonathan put in, in the way of a little boy.

David clapped his brother on the back. "Ay," said he, grinning; " 'tis in your charge, too. You

is second in command, ye saucy little nipper! You'd die for that bit o' fur. Wouldn't you? Eh?"

"I'd come t' grips with any dog in the pack," Jonathan boasted.

"I 'low you'd simply throttle a big dog with them wee hands o' yours!"

Jonathan bared his teeth.

"I'd kill un somehow," said he, quietly, "an' you may lay t' that, m' lad!"

The stranger said:

"Expecting your pa back soon?"

"About a fortnight."

"That's a long time."

"Ay; you'll be far t' the south by that time."

"I will that," the stranger declared, "if there's speed in dog flesh under the lash!"

It being late by that time, and the stranger taking the trail so early in the morning, they turned in, though the little Cuffs were loath to give the man up to his rest; and presently they were all asleep—the little Cuffs in their blankets in the cockloft, and the stranger rolled up in a wolf-skin on the floor, with the firelight lying red on his worn, uneasy face. It blew high all that night from the southeast. The gale came rushing up Smokestack Arm, confined by the hills; and the ice, yielding to the wind and seas from the open, was broken to fragments, with the sea stirring in long swells beneath so that no dogs could draw a komatik across

its heaving surface from Peep Cove to Bald Head; and the way to Walk Harbor was surely by the 'longshore trail over the hills. When, the first light of dawn being then aboard, the little Cuffs tumbled down the cock-loft ladder, David to light the fire and Mary in agitated haste to make the stranger's breakfast, the frosty room was empty and still. There was no sign of the stranger except the tumbled wolf-skin in the middle of the floor; and David lit the lamp, and the three little Cuffs stared at the wolf-skin, gone blank with disappointment.

"He've gone!"

"An' without a bite o' breakfast!"

"'Tis a shockin' pity!"

"Ah, well, we had company over night," said Mary, "an' we've that much t' remember an' be thankful for."

"'Twill be something t' talk about anyhow."

"Ay."

Gone was the stranger. Gone were his dogs. Gone, too, was the skin of the silver fox.

VI

THE LAW IN HIS OWN HANDS

IT was a brutal theft. It was sordid, too, in the ease and security of it. There was no telegraph on the coast. There was no police. Walk Harbor was far to the south, Windy Tickle far to the north, and there was no grown man between—no power of any sort to which the ravished little Cuffs could appeal. When Jonathan discovered the drear, astounding loss of the fur, it was noon. The stranger had by that time won away from pursuit, far off on the 'longshore trail to Walk Harbor, which he had taken, as the broken snow indicated. David Cuff confronted a crossing of Smokestack Arm as the only means whereby the man could be overtaken. The 'longshore trail rounded the Arm and led over the crest of Bald Head; and Bald Head lay directly across the swelling ice of the Arm from Peep Cove—the bare, white dome of it visible against a gray sky from a window of the tilt. The stranger could be intercepted where the trail emerged from Swamp Wood and ran down the south flank of Bald Head to the low shores of the sea. He must take that path: there was no other

—it was elsewhere a vast, inimical wilderness, without refuge; and he could there be caught and commanded by a cunning lad with the law in his own hands.

"Will you kill un, Davy?" said Jonathan.

"I will if I haves to."

"Ah, kill the man, b'y!"

"I'll have that fur. I'll kill the man fast enough if need be t' get it. Not else."

"Ah, he's a wicked——"

"'Tis not my business t' punish the wicked."

"Wrest it from the poor man," Mary Cuff advised. "There's no gain t' come from his death."

"Wrest it from a big man like he!" Jonathan scoffed.

"Let un be dead or alive," David declared, "I cares not which. He'll yield me that fur that he stole. An' that's the end o' my quest an' my trouble."

Within the hour the long sealing gun was packed with powder and charged with such scraps of metal as the eager Jonathan could lay hands on and discreetly cram into the wide muzzle; and the komatik was loaded with an ample provision for five days of the wintry open—rations and robes and sleeping-bags and dog-food and billets of wood—and the dogs were in the traces and David and Jonathan were ready for the passage of Smokestack Arm from the shelter of Peep Cove to the cliffs and broken shore of Bald Head.

"There's one good thing about that big gun," said Jonathan, "an' I likes her for it, too."

"What's that?"

"She holds a lot."

"Is it a heavy charge, Jonathan? I hopes you haven't crammed her full. She's too old."

"She's crammed with all that she'll safely contain."

"What you load her with?"

"At a range o' twenty fathom," Jonathan replied, "what I put in her would sweep the country. She'd take in an' kill twenty men at that distance. There'd be no escape for a single one of un."

"What is it mostly?"

"Well, mostly," said Jonathan, grimly, "'tis chunks o' some lead jiggers an' a lot o' ten-penny nails. You isn't very much of a shot, Davy," he added, "an' I was 'lowin' t' give you a fair chance t' fetch the man down. With that charge, b'y, you can't miss un. 'Tis impossible."

When David and Jonathan were well out on the ice, Mary turned to those housewifely duties with which she was used to finding distraction in the emergencies which took the men-folk from home into a peril or labor no woman could share. She swept, she dusted, she polished; and by and by, when the tilt was as spick and span as the cabin of a gentleman's yacht, the end of the afternoon drawing near, she sat by the frosted window to sew on a seal-hide jacket for Jonathan.

While she was stitching patiently in the failing light, there came a vigorous thump at the door, and without waiting for her to open, two men stamped into the room and peered eagerly about.

"The devil looks after the wicked, Calk," grumbled the taller of the two angrily. "He ain't here."

"No, confound 'im," replied the other. "An' to think, Rime, of our losin' five days in Fool Harbor, what with the big blow an' the dogs bein' knocked up."

Rime turned suddenly to Mary, who had retreated to a place of safety behind the table.

"Girl," said he, "did a stranger stop here not long since—a tall un with a black beard and a long red scar on th' side o' his nose? We thought he must 'a done it, for you've the only tilt along this bit o' the coast."

"Yeth, he did," lisped Mary, eager to tell her story, "an' he had a long mark on his nose, an' his name was Black, an' he runned away with the silver fox skin, an' David an' Jonathan goed after un with the big gun."

"Name's Black?" snorted Rime scornfully; "his name's Marsh. The Hudson's Bay Company's got a thousand dollars on his black head, and we've chased un all th' way from Pepper Tickle."

"An' who's David an' Jonathan?" put in Calk.

"Pleath, David an' Jonathan ith my brothers," lisped Mary, proudly, "an' they told pa they'd look

after the silver fox skin he catched, an' they jest *had* to get it back."

"Ay," said Rime; "Trapper Tom's lads. Plucky young 'uns. Which way did th' dirty thief go, girl —acrost the Arm or 'longshore?"

"He went this mornin'—early—an' he went 'longshore, an' David an' Jonathan they went crost th' Arm t' head un off at Bald Head."

"A good lead," grumbled Rime. "Com' on, Calk; we can't wait here."

But Rime was for a cup of tea and a snack of grub at least.

"There's a big snow comin'," said he. "The man's in our hands."

"He'll give us the slip if we dally."

"We'll not dally long."

"Have your own way. Could you give us a cup o' tea, my girl?"

"I could that—an' glad of it!"

They halted.

At intervals through the winter, Smokestack Arm was broken up by the gales. In quiet weather it was solid and still, its white miles, under the gray sky, rough with a confusion of great fragments, the pans folded and tipped, the whole frozen in a contorted attitude. When the wind blew high from the southeast, the sea encroached again. Swelling under the edge of the ice, lifting the frontiers, breaking great sheets from the field, and

crunching these sheets into lesser pans, it crept up the Arm, eating its way in gigantic bites, until the width and length of the Arm, from Peep Cove to Bald Head and far inland, was a squealing, tossing expanse, the fragments rising and falling as the big seas swelled beneath. And this was the condition of the Arm, the wind having blown a gale from the southeast for a day and a night, when David and Jonathan, with Mary watching from the shore, whipped the wise, reluctant dogs from the rocks of the coast to the first heaving pans of the floe and made off toward the crest of Bald Head. In the opinion of the dogs the Arm was impossible. They howled and barked in complaint. It was the lash that drove them on.

At first the way was comparatively secure and the labor of it was light. The pans were wide. They lay inshore. The sea stirred softly, exhausted, beneath them. But as the komatik struggled toward the midst of the Arm, drawing nearer the open water, on the diagonal to Bald Head, the motion of the ice increased, the width of the pans lessening all the while, and the peril and difficulty grew swiftly greater. Midway of the passage—the southeast gone blue-black with a threat of snow, and dusk then approaching—dogs and komatik, the boys scrambling behind, crawled over a long, slow, sluggish swell, precisely as though they traveled the surface of a heaving sea. Some of the greater pans lay almost still, like long ships,

and the course was sped with shouts and with cracks of the whip; but the tossing of the little pans was violent and steep, so that there were times when the komatik threatened to slide back, and the dogs strained to hold it, as upon a declivity. Their feet slipped. David and Jonathan must lend aid with their shoulders until the subsidence of the wave canted the pan and sent them tumbling forward.

Night caught David and Jonathan on the ice. Bald Head merged with the color of the dusk and vanished. There were no landmarks. It fell black dark. The wind rose. It was charged with fine, dry snow, like stifling clouds of dust. They halted on a commodious pan, loosed the dogs from the traces, made a fire in the niggardly lee of the komatik, and went into camp, being then three miles from the cliffs of Bald Head. By that time the ice was in fragments clear to the furthest shores of the Arm. The pans were in close, grinding contact, herded in the Arm like sheep in a pen. In the lift and fall of the seas their edges rubbed and crunched. Occasionally a pan broke under pressure with a clap like an explosion. Sometimes a pan, as though unable to endure the crush, lifted itself from the press, upended and dripping; and sometimes areas of the floe folded and collapsed—one pan slipping over another. Thus Smokestack Arm was writhing and screaming. Through this motion and commotion, however, David and Jona-

than slept sound in their bags, the ten dogs of the team snuggled close.

When they crawled out of their bags in the morning there was a blizzard abroad.

"Where is we, Davy?" said Jonathan.

"I don't know, b'y. We'll have a sip o' tea an' a bite anyhow. An' then we'll look about us an' plunge on."

"You reckon the wind has changed?"

"I don't know."

"I reckon it has."

"Oh, I reckon not, Jonathan. The ice is still wonderful tight. The same ol' wind is holdin' it."

"Maybe not."

"I reckon so. An' if the wind is blowin' from the same quarter we'll find our way ashore easy enough."

"She may not be blowin' from the same quarter."

"We'll go right ahead, anyhow, jus' as if we knowed for sure that she was. There isn't nothin' else t' do."

"We got t' get ashore, Davy."

"We'll get ashore."

"We got to."

"We'll do very well."

"We got t' get ashore quick."

"Time enough."

"If the wind has changed an' this here whole pack is movin' out t' sea we'll have small chance——"

"We've chance enough."

"Not at sea."

"Oh, well, we isn't goin' t' sea," David drawled. "We is perfectly safe, so far as that goes."

Jonathan was indignant.

"I'm not troubled about bein' safe," said he. "I'm not worried in the least about that.'

"No?"

"I'm jus' thinkin' about gettin' ashore in a hurry an' killin' that man!"

"We'll kill un," David replied, confidently.

The snow was too thick, the day too broad, for any determination of direction. In the thick wind the light was drab and diffused. East was the same as west. The whirling murk of the gale enclosed David and Jonathan in a narrow circle beyond which nothing was visible. Bald. Head was deeply lost. The only indication of its whereabouts lay in its relation to the direction of the wind. If the wind had not changed, it could be located and might be achieved; if the wind had changed so much as a point in the night, a course derived from its direction would lead far wide of the mark. Having breakfasted, however, and thrown the dogs a few fish, David and Jonathan put the shivering, frightened team in the traces, and whipped it off the big pan upon which the night had been spent, choosing a direction across the wind. But the dogs were obstinate: they objected to the labor, they declined the direction—they whimpered and

sulked and lay down; and they resisted the urge of the whip with persistent determination and yelped for what seemed to be the mercy of rest. David maintained the direction, however, and lashed the team to its work.

It was a reasonable mutiny. The dogs were not in a fury. They were aware of the predicament and contrary-minded in relation to David's choice of the way of egress. Presently Curly, the gray leader, lay flat on his belly, his nose between his paws. When he heard the whip crack, he turned on his back, paws in the air, beseeching, protesting; and when the whip cracked again he leaped up and tugged to the right, but was whipped again to the course. Big Junk, the bully, refused duty. It was his part to keep the team at work—to snap at the heels of the lazy and overawe the quarrelsome; but this he would not do—he slunk with the rest, careless, downcast, ill-tempered. By and by, however, the dogs yielded to David's will. They perceived and accepted the direction he had definitely taken. It was no time for contention, for waste of effort, for divided counsel. They settled sullenly to the labor, as though, overcome by David's mastery, they had divested themselves of responsibility, and would serve with all the strength they had, come what might of the error they suspected. After that there was steady progress.

There was an hour of it. Two—three—four. It was past noon. The wind had not fallen. Nor

had the snow thinned. So thick and blinding was the gale that Curly, in the leading trace, thirty feet in advance, was invisible. David and Jonathan struggled into the smothering violence of the wind as through a medium that was palpable and must be breasted and broken apart like thick underbrush. From time to time they halted to rest and draw breath. They stood with their backs to the wind, leaning against it, as against an invisible wall; and they shielded lips and nostrils with their hands as though to strain the air of its stifling dry dust of snow and burning frost. And all this while the ice was heaving and swaying underfoot—the komatik tending to slip back and suddenly to plunge forward as the incline of the pans changed in the running swells; and the advance was in spurts and laborious pauses—down-hill dashes from one pan over a crunching break to the rising slant of the next, with the long gaps and black water-holes of the floe to beware of and circumvent.

Presently the dogs stopped. They were sullen and obdurate. Curly was down. Junk was down. The rest of the pack taking the cue from the bully and the leader, as always, hugged the ice and would not budge. To halt, bewildered and hopeless, deterred by fear and confusion from the attempt to advance, was to be cast away. David beat and cajoled Curly to his feet and led him forward. Jonathan followed the komatik blindly, keeping a hand on it lest he be left behind and lost; and when

the komatik hesitated on the slant of a pan he put his shoulders to it, the dogs meanwhile scratching the ice in a straining effort to hold the position. In this way they stumbled across the wind for a hundred yards. It was as though an earthquake disturbed the surface which they traversed. Catastrophe was all the while imminent—a last, complete catastrophe, involving them in sudden wreck and death in the manner of the earthquakes of fable, their speed and vast, overwhelming power, as when the earth opens and swallows the inhabitants of the city.

David and Jonathan had not only the motion of the pans to impede and threaten them; nor did the wind and snow and frost chiefly alarm them—the suffering of a sweeping weather at thirty degrees below zero. They were used and inured to wind and frost; and they were hardened to labor, which accompanied the miles of every midwinter journey —accustomed, too, to the peculiar dangers and difficulties of traveling the ice. They confronted two extraordinary contingencies of peril, due to the pressure of the gale on the confined floe, against which they would have no warning and could have no defense. The one was that a pan, yielding to this pressure, would lift itself up and drop them into the sea, with the floe closing overhead; and the other was that the floe, in case of the same pressure, would fold or "rafter"—the pans slip one over the other, as the earth sometimes folds in a

quake, and heap themselves up in a mortal confusion. This was happening, in greater or less degree, in the depths of the gale roundabout—areas folding and pans rearing out of the press. At intervals a clap and rumble and rasping indicated it.

David halted the dogs and stumbled back to Jonathan. He put a hand on the little boy's shoulder. They turned their backs to the wind.

"I don't know where we is!" David shouted.

"Me neither!"

"What you think about it?"

"Bald Head's somewheres 'round here."

"We're comin' near t' the edge o' the ice. Bigger swells here. The floe's looser."

Jonathan nodded.

"I reckon we've bore too far t' seaward," David shouted. "We've shot past Bald Head. She lies behind."

"Can't stay here."

"No."

Through all the labor of the day, its hardship and alarm, Jonathan's sturdy purpose had been engaged with the object of the passage.

"If we don't get ashore afore long," he roared, "we'll lose that man for good an' all."

"He's not abroad in this gale."

"That he is! He've fear t' prick un on."

"Ay—maybe he'll move."

"He will, Davy."

"He'll do naught but flounder a mile or two."

"We've got t' cotch un. We can't bide here in idleness."

"We're past Bald Head an' bound out t' sea," said David. "We'd best turn back an' feel for the coast."

Jonathan pondered.

"Leave it t' the dogs," he replied. "If there's land hereabouts they'll know it. Bid Curly go on. There's nothin' else t' do."

"I was thinkin' so," said David.

Curly was the most alert, intelligent dog of the pack. For that reason he was in the longest trace. He was a dependable, capable leading dog, not a conspicuously brilliant beast, amazingly endowed. Out of harness, in private life, he was a coward and a cunning thief, with nothing to recommend him above the dogs of the coast, which are distinguished, indeed, for dishonesty and bloody treachery; but in harness, on active service, he was brisk, devoted, indefatigable, wise. For four years he had been the leader of Trapper Tom Cuff's team of ten; and in that time he had accumulated a store of experience—traveling the ice and the wilderness in a responsible office. When David bade him go on, he held to the direction into which he had already been beaten. Presently, however, discovering the absence of authority, he bore slyly to the right, as though to have his own way undetected; and then, as though sure that no punishment would follow a wider deviation, he turned openly, vigorously to

the right, yelping and whimpering excitedly in the cloud of snow that concealed him.

David and Jonathan followed the slow, erratic course of the komatik, stumbling in its wake, keeping within touch of it, lending the dogs what strength they had. They were stupid with cold and exhaustion. They withdrew from the labor and misery of their situation to the refuge of memory and imagination. Their dull consciousness was not concerned with the wind and snow and ice. Conflict with these obstacles was reflex. They labored doggedly, grimly, incessantly, pushing and holding the komatik in the heave of the ice; but the incidents of the struggle made no impression beneath the surface of their dreams and were immediately forgotten—contrasting dreams of warmth and light and rest. They did not definitely perceive even the approach of dusk; the failing light did not alarm them—they plodded forward, stupid, plastered with snow, bent, gasping. Nor when the komatik came to a stop and the dogs collapsed on stationary ice were they immediately aware of the significance of a sudden cessation of the wind. There was no wind—a mere fluttering breath of wind; and the ice was not in motion. And presently they understood.

David said:

"We're in the lee o' Bald Head. There's no wind. We must be close t' the cliff here."

"Must be close."

"Hole-in-the-Wall must be somewheres near. I reckon I can find it. Don't stray. I'll keep callin' t' you."

David vanished in the dark.

"Keep close, Davy," Jonathan called.

A moment later David shouted:

"I've found it! We're off the mouth of it!"

Then they drove the dogs into the cave called Hole-in-the-Wall and made a fire with their birch billets.

In the wilderness, a blood-guilty man, being armed, will not be taken alive and unhurt. His environment determines him. He is like a wild animal of the wilderness. He will fight at bay until he is killed or sorely wounded.

When, therefore, in the fair, still weather of the next day, the sky blue and the sun high, Marsh emerged from Swamp Wood and drove down the south flank of Bald Head to the boulders and stunted spruce on the low shore of the sea, there confronting David and Jonathan Cuff, who sprang from the ambush of a boulder and bade him halt, their errand and resolution apparent, he conceived the death of both antagonists if he could not outwit them.

David and Jonathan were in danger. So too, however, was Marsh. David had never before been wronged. Nobody had robbed or in any way oppressed him. Nor had he ever been cognizant of

a crime from personal contact with it. Newfoundland schooners fished the waters of Smokestack Arm in summer weather. The crews were simple, amiable fellows, who disputed, occasionally, to be sure, and were known to have employed their fists in the adjustment of certain trifling differences of opinion; but there had never been a robber among them, never one man to wrong another in any grave way—never the need of police and a magistrate to compel an observance of the elemental law that obtained on the coast. Acquainted with crime merely by hearsay, having no knowledge whatsoever of the protection of the law by means of its duly appointed officers, and now outraged by the first breach of his own rights, David had, in a primitive impulse to defend his own, taken the law in his own hands. He was as ready and as resolute to kill Marsh as Marsh was to kill him.

Marsh laughed. It was like a bark.

"Where'd you little nippers come from?" said he. "You must have crossed the Arm. What's all this howdy-do? What d'ye want?"

David answered steadily:

"You knows what we wants. An' I'll trouble you t' hand it over."

"Put up the gun. You might——"

"Hand it over!"

The crisp ring in David's voice startled Marsh. The demand snapped like a pistol shot. David stood within fifty feet of Marsh. He held the great,

antique sealing gun in the manner of a man shooting from the hip. He was poised and steady and venomously alert. There was a shaft of death in his gray eye.

"Would you murder me?"

"No parley!"

Jonathan spoke gleefully.

"She's crammed t' the muzzle," said he, "with ten-penny nails an' chunks o' lead. He can't miss you."

David said to Jonathan:

"Count ten, b'y."

"One!" said Jonathan.

"What's this?" Marsh cried. You won't——"

"Two!" said Jonathan.

"I'll kill you," said David, "when he says ten."

"Three!" said Jonathan.

Marsh's rifle was strapped to the komatik. He reached for it in a swift movement.

"Back!" David shouted.

Marsh withdrew his hand.

"Four!" said Jonathan.

"Do that again," David threatened, "an' I'll break my bargain with you, and shoot you out o' hand."

"Five!" said Jonathan.

Marsh turned on Jonathan.

"Shut up, you little fool!" he roared. "Do you think you can scare a man like——"

"Six!" said Jonathan.

For a moment, eye to eye with David, whose eyes were alight, Marsh pondered his situation.

"Seven!" said Jonathan. "Eight!"

"Wait a minute," Marsh argued. "Let's talk this thing over. I'll offer you——"

"Nine!" said Jonathan.

Marsh threw up his hands as David tightened his hold of the gun and braced himself for the shock of the explosion.

"You win!" he screamed. "Don't kill me!"

Jonathan burst out laughing. Then he surveyed Marsh with the scorn of an untried courage.

"Bah!" said he. "I'm sorry you yielded."

"Take the fur from the komatik an' pass it t' the lad. If you so much as makes a move for the rifle I'll kill you where you stands."

Marsh disclosed the fur and advanced with it. Jonathan met him half way.

"Here!" said Marsh. "Take it!"

After all a boy is not a match for a man—neither in strength nor in cunning. Let the boy be as resolute as you will, as keen and as quick, his wits are not experienced. It seemed to David that he commanded the situation—that Marsh was at his mercy and subject to his will. Jonathan was sure of it. He swaggered toward Marsh, grinning. And Marsh seemed to be broken and resigned. But he was neither. He was waiting. It had occurred to Marsh, though neither to David nor Jonathan, th-

Jonathan was advancing into the line of fire, and that a sealing gun, charged with slugs of lead and ten-penny nails, would kill both if it killed one. When Jonathan extended his hand for the fur, Marsh caught him by the wrist and jerked him into his arms. Safe then from the blast of slugs in David's gun, he ignored David, carried the struggling little Jonathan to the komatik, possessed himself of his rifle, and turned reclining against the komatik.

David had not stirred. He was beaten and he knew it. And there was no recovery.

"Now," said Marsh to David, "it's my turn to count. I'm going to count ten, my boy. That's what you did. If you're not out of sight by that time, I'll kill you. One!"

David stood his ground.

"Two!"

Jonathan said:

"Go, Davy, he'll kill you."

David stood, debating.

"Three!"

Something aroused and distracted David's attention. He was not listening to Marsh. He released an ear from his hood.

"Four!" Marsh counted. "Five!"

David let the butt of his gun to the snow. His ear was cocked to the crest of Bald Head. "You may shoot me," he said then; "but——"

"Six!"

"Jonathan, near gone mad with rage in the grip of Marsh's legs and left arm, and now exhausted and impotent, screamed to David, with the spirit of a little berserker, the sense of his own jeopardy banished by fury and ignored:

"Shoot! Shoot!"

"Seven!"

"Don't mind me, Davy! Shoot! He means t' kill you! Shoot! Shoot!"

"Eight!"

David would not yield to the man. A high pride deterred him. He stood waiting. Force had never compelled him to obedient action. It had never before been applied to his will. His shoulders were squared and his chin was high. To rush Marsh with the long gun was not practical strategy. Marsh would throw Jonathan aside and drop David with his rifle before Jonathan could recover to interrupt him.

"Nine!"

"I dare ye!" said David.

Marsh snarled.

"If I say ten I'll kill you as you'd kill me. Mark me, now! You're on the edge of death."

"I dare ye!"

Two men and a team of dogs scrambled over the crest of Bald Head and tumbled down the brief hill. It was the end of Marsh's numerical exercise. He dropped Jonathan and turned to meet the new adversaries. Before he could lift his rifle, Jonathan

had gripped it, stock and barrel, and was wrestling for it. The delay was fatal to Marsh's defense. He could not shake Jonathan off.

Then Rime's voice shouted from the shelter of a boulder:

"I can pick you off from here, Marsh! Throw up your hands!"

Marsh threw up his hands.

"You damned dog," said Calk a minute later as he tied the criminal's arms securely. "If y' hadn't stopped t' rob th' kiddies, we might a had t' follow y' clean to Quebec."

"You'd a done it, too," piped Jonathan, "if David an' me hadn't a stopped un."

"Right y' are, son," said Rime, "and your fox-skin'll be worth a couple o' hundred more'n it was afore the dirty murderer an' thief took it, if I have anything t' say about the divvy up o' th' prize money. Here,—you carry his gun. Com' on, Calk; we won't be so long gettin' un back t' Pepper Tickle as we were overhaulin' un. He'll stay right with us and make what moves we wants un to now."

And turning the noses of the dogs to the north they topped the crest of Bald Head and plunged into the windy stretches of the 'longshore trail.

III

THE LAST LUCIFER

I

AT GRIPS WITH THE ICE

'TWAS a bright dawn. I minds it well. 'Tis no wonder. I've fair cause t' recall an' detest it. It misled an' stripped the best of us Newf'un'landers t' the lightest need in March weather. Me—I was sixteen; an' I was fanciful, accordin' t' my years in the world an' the mold o' spirit I was fashioned in. Like the lad that I was, bein' daft with love at the time, I likened the light to a blush; an' I thought o' the cheek of a maid I knowed, as calves will. From my father's landin' stage at Rough-an'-Tumble Harbor, shiverin' in the frost, with sleep still gluin' my eyes, I watched the great dawn o' that day swell over the floe an' climb up the sky. It come rosy an' swift. I don't mind ever seein' all the colors o' glory flow through the clouds an' flood the sea in a way more lovely t' behold. Thinks I—an' I fancied 'twas clever t' think of: "The heavens will waste an' exhaust their store o' color in the east an' there'll be nothin' left for the sunset this day." Nor was there any flutter or whisper o' wind in the world. 'Twas as tranquil abroad as a Sabbath twilight in August

weather; an' ol' Johnnie Wheel was ringin' the church bell, too, jus' like Sunday—spreadin' a rumor o' seals on the floe, which news had come over from Telltale Island in the night. Ay, 'tis true—we folk o' Rough-an'-Tumble was all deluded an' ensnared in a way that we've not forgot.

"Swiles! Swiles!"

We men o' Rough-an'-Tumble was jus' roarin' mad t' be off t' the floe an' first at the slaughter.

"Cast off!" says my father.

We fair shot through the tickle in the lead o' the Rough-an'-Tumble fleet o' small craft.

"Civil weather," says my Uncle Mark; "the sea's as flat as a pancake all the way t' the ice."

By an' by a blue day begun t' break. It jus' fair cracked out o' the sky. Thinks I—an' I chuckled with pleasure: "The sky has jus' hatched the mornin'!" 'Twas t' be yellow that day, thinks we. 'Twould be drippin' hot on the ice. A man could shed his coat an' go easy, glad t' be rid o' the heat an' burden of it; an' afore noon, anyhow, foolishly bundled for frost an' a smart wind, he would be wet with the labor o' the slaughter. A nor'east breeze o' wind had urged the ice in from the open in the night. 'Twas lyin' a mere matter o' six miles out from the heads o' Rough-an'-Tumble Harbor. There was no call for caution. In that still weather the ice was jus' dawdlin' past in the drift. Between, the sea was clear an' flat; an' clear an' flat 'twould remain, thinks we, until the punts crawled home

loaded in the frost o' dusk. An' thinks I—an' I shuddered t' think of it: "The night will come creepin' out o' the sea on swift feet an' may cotch us unwary." All at once then, 'way off shore, the floe flashed in the first sunlight; an' by that time the punts o' Rough-an'-Tumble was racin' for it, all hilarious an' eager, an' we could see the men o' Chance Cove an' Telltale Island at work in the swarm o' swiles, an' I had livelier notions t' busy me than the soft feet an' savage purpose o' the night, whatever it might be.

We was in my father's big punt. There was four of us aboard. Mark Oldland, my mother's brother, him that was a lay preacher, was scullin' the course, whilst we others bent the spruce, there bein' no wind t' favor our speed.

"Anybody got a lucifer?" says my father.

"I isn't," says I.

"Not me," says Uncle Mark.

I never heard my father ask for a lucifer in that way afore. 'Twas so sudden, an t' my notion so queer, since there was no reason in it that I could fathom, that I laughed outright.

"What you laughin' at anyhow?" says my father.

"You're no smoker, sir," says I.

"True," says he; "but that's nothin' t' laugh about, is it? You've knowed that all your life long, my son, an' you've hitherto managed t' control your amusement. Come now," says he; "what you laughin' at?"

"I'm laughin' at you smokin'."

"I isn't goin' t' smoke."

"You're so pious an' goodly, sir," says I, "that 'twas comical jus' t' think o' you with a pipe in your big brown beard."

"'Tis a spectacle o' waste an' ungodliness, my son," says he, "that will never stir your naughty mirth."

'Twas jus' like my father. He was no lover o' waste. Flushed with the correction, I pulled stoutly on my oars.

"I'm sorry for my fault, sir," says I. "I'll mend my humor."

George Salt says: "Here's a match, Skipper John."

"I'm 'bliged t' you," says my father.

"You is welcome, sir," says George Salt. "I got more."

"Bein' a heavy smoker," says my father, "I've no doubt your weskit pocket is jammed with matches."

"Ay," says George; "maybe 'tis."

My father took the match then from George Salt; an' he opened his clasp knife an' begun t' whittle the wood to a sharp point. I mind he bungled the task. With nothin' t' do but strain my back I watched un idly whilst I pulled on my oars. The haft o' the little match broke off—oh, maybe half an inch or a mite more; an' my father went "Tst, tst, tst!" in disgust, jus' as if he fancied hisself

wonderful clumsy an' wasteful. My father hoped, says he, that George Salt would spare un another, if need be. Skipper George dropped his oar t' search his weskit pocket; but my father says "Pull away, ye idle lubber!" an' nothin' come of it. Still an' all, afore my father accomplished a point sharp enough t' content the captious taste of un, a deal o' that lucifer was in shreds on the floor o' the skiff. I mind well enough the pitiful state o' that match—the mean remnant that was left—because o' what come t' pass. Not the half of it was left —I've cause t' know that; an' when the shavin' of it to a point is considered the bulk of it approached not much more than a quarter. Take it weight for weight, an you will, an' compare the part with the whole. Well, I'll say, then, that 'twas more than a quarter an' less than a half. I reckon that's near enough for good judgment. An' you'll bear it in mind an you please, my sirs.

Anyhow, whilst my father shaped the match t' suit his purpose, he looked up; an' he says, as I've told you:

"I'm 'bliged t' you, Skipper George. I'm in sore need of a match."

"What you goin' t' do with it?" says I.

My father was a kind man. But he would correct my faults in public. An' he was no lover o' the idle curiosity t' which I was give in them days.

"Nothin' much," says he.

"You're wastin' pains, then," says I.

"A man can't waste pains, my son," says he. "Let a man do with care what he does at all."

"Well, anyhow," says I, "you're wastin' a deal o' that match."

"I fashion the match t' fit my need."

"There's not much left t' burn."

"No?" says he.

"An you dared strike that match," says I, "I venture t' predict that you'd burn your fingers an' drop it like a stingin' bee."

"Do you pull away, my son, an' not stare at your elders," says he. "I'll employ this match in secret an' enlighten your curiosity at my leisure hereafter."

From that comes my tale o' the last lucifer—whether 'tis worth tellin' or not.

Long afore noon we was landed on the floe. There was men from Chance Cove there—men from Telltale Island an' Lobster Bight an' Hook-an'-Line an' Chain Harbor—four hundred men an' more, 'twas afterward computed. Thinks I, when I seed the ice flow red—an' I sickened t' think of it: "All the world walks hand in hand with sudden death this day an' there's no compassion anywhere." In the quiet weather the ice was loose—gone abroad, spread wide, an' shot an' honeycombed with lanes an' lakes o' water; an' we had trouble gettin' about—passin' from pan t' pan. Man, 'twas hot on the floe, too—the sun pourin' down from

aloft an' strikin' up from the ice—an' we sweated ourselves drippin' wet, an' flung off our mitts an' jackets an' weskits. Still an' all, 'twas an easy slaughter, I mind—harp swiles an' their fat young white-coats. 'Twas no great trouble t' shoot the mothers an' bat the young whilst they squirmed an' whimpered like babies.

So great was the bounty o' the Lord, says my Uncle Mark, that the folk o' the coast should live righteously that season thereafter, in gratitude an' praise; an' 'twould be but spiteful fellows, says he, that would grieve the Lord's goodness with sin. We had killed a load afore we nibbled our hard bread in the noonin'; an' we had hauled the kill t' the edge o' the ice, too, where my father's big skiff lay moored.

"The day's not spent," says my father.

"An we're smart enough," says Uncle Mark, "we've time t' receive more o' the Lord's abundance. The weather's settled, true enough. But there's no tellin' where the wind will blow from next. I'm thinkin' the floe will be gone t' sea by mornin'. As for me," says he, "I'm all for industrious behavior. I'm in favor of a second load."

"Think there's time?" says my father.

"Time enough for tryin'."

"'Tis a long way ashore," says George Salt. "I'm in favor o' bein' content with what we got. I've not much heart for pullin' in this hot weather."

"Hut!" says Uncle Mark.

"We'll be cotched by the dusk," says George, "an' delayed for supper."

"It costs nothin' but labor t' try," says Uncle Mark. "If 'tis nothin' gained, 'tis nothin' wasted."

"You'll be sore with hunger by nighttime, Skipper Mark."

"I learned years ago," says Uncle Mark, "t' subject my belly t' my will."

"Ay, Mark," says my father, "the wisdom is with you. You an' the crew take the fat t' harbor, then. I'll bide here on the ice an' kill what I can."

"So be it," says Uncle Mark.

"Ay," says George.

"Lively, lads!" says my father. "I'm not likin' t' be left out here on the ice too long alone."

"An you please," says George, "jus' a jiffy."

"All hands," says my father, "an' no delay."

"Jus' a jiffy,' says George, "by your favor."

George struck a match. It went out—jus' sizzled an' died. 'Twas damp. He flung it away.

"Make haste!" says Uncle Mark.

"I wants t' light my pipe," says George. "I'll pull all the better for it."

"You been lightin' your pipe all this day," says Uncle Mark.

"Oh no!" says George.

"You is! I been fair stumblin' over the burnt matches you've cast away!"

"I got lots," says George.

"You're a wasteful fellow in all things," says

Uncle Mark. "There'll come a day when you'll be beggin' what you now casts away."

"Matches, Skipper Mark?"

"I don't mean matches."

"I could build a raft with the matches I got."

"Still an' all, there's a bottom t' that weskit pocket."

"As for me," says my father, "whatever I haves I conserves against a time o' need."

"'Tis good discretion in a man," says Uncle Mark, who favored my father in all his ways, like a twin, "t' hang on t' what he has until need fair compels un t' cast loose."

"When a man haves no matches," says my father, "an' needs one——"

Another match sizzled out.

"Have done! Come aboard!"

In haste George struck again. Too great haste—the match went out. He struck again. That match, too, failed un. He grew wrathful with the delay. An' he wasted another or two an' cursed the trader that sold them.

"I got these here lucifers from Bill Prest o' the *Flyin' Robin,*" says he. "I'll trade no more good fish for bad matches along o' he."

"You'll never strike a match," says Uncle Mark, "on them bloody trousers."

George burst out laughin'.

"True enough!" says he. "I'm all bloody!"

The next match was struck on the gunwale o'

the punt. It burned. 'Twas a splendid match. I 'low a man couldn't find a better match nowhere. An' George lit his pipe an' come puffin' aboard. An' then we sot out from the floe t' land the fat at Rough-an'-Tumble.

We landed the fat. By that time we was squirmin' with uneasiness about the day.

"Bad omens," says Uncle Mark. "I'm grieved."

It felt like foul weather. The day was sullen an' heavy. With my father on the ice t' be fetched home or drift t' sea an' freeze solid, we put out daft with fear an' haste. When the wind fell down on us we was halfway back t' the floe—well past Little Rock an' Ol' Wives' Lee, I minds. It come wonderful sudden an' sly—that vast, cold gale o' wind. Dear man, 'twas like the leap of a black host from ambush. I can think o' nothin' so apt t' describe the onslaught an' the tumblin' clamor an' power of it. Thinks I—an' my heart shrank from the black sight: "The armies o' the wind rush out t' slay an' all we insufficient will perish in the white tramp o' their feet on the sea."

A black cloud swelled large over the land. It burst aloft—smeared an' spattered the sky. A squall, jumpin' fair out o' the tickle t' Rough-an'-Tumble, slapped us in the face. After that, the first gust come whirlin' out, whippin' the sea in their passage; an' the full blast o' the gale tumbled off shore an' galloped down, the sea boilin' white an' the air turned thick an' nauseous with spindrift.

'Twas not long, mark you—this rash change o' face from the yellow warmth an' calm o' noon t' the drivin' gale o' wind that burst that evenin' an' blowed all through the night. An the truth's in me, they tells the same tale of it at Chance Cove an' all the harbors o' the Bay.

They tells, too, how mortal cold it was—a drop o' forty degrees in an hour an' a half. An' there we was in the thick of it, cotched at sea by wind an' frost, jus' as they tells the tale o' that gale from Twillingate Long Point t' Mother Burke o' Cape John; an' we was all involved in the mess an' murk of it, an' battlin' for life in the smother, almost afore we knowed that trouble was brewin'—the pack of us: Men from Chance Cove an' Telltale Island, Hook-an'-Line an' Chain Harbor, Lobster Bight an' Rough-an'-Tumble. "An' all damp with sweat an' blood," they'll tell you—an' 'tis true; "an' the frost jus' pourin' down with the wind!"

Cold weather fell like sudden death in the wake o' the first squalls an' gripped us; 'twas below zero in a twinklin'—so bitter all at once, I minds, that we whimpered a complaint of it, like trustful men taken unaware with injustice, an' scorned an' sore maltreated. We run out under sail with the wind from shore. Spindrift flushed us like sheets o' rain —snatched off the sea an' flung forth. 'Twould have drenched us t' the bones had it not froze as it fell; but freezin' speedily it left us dry within an' shed water like an oilskin slicker. We was shiverin'

cold—the naked flesh of us was soon touched with frost—yet we was not damp deep beneath the fuzz of our jackets; an' I minds that I marveled about this an' grinned t' think o' the queer thing—the cloth o' ice I was clad in that day.

The skiff gathered ice an' come into peril with the weight of it. We chopped her free lest she topple an' founder. I minds well the state o' my Uncle Mark, him with the steerin' oar, sittin' still an' watchful, his head down an' his shoulders haunched —his beard was froze to his breast, an' icicles hung from his cap as from the eaves of a cottage ashore; an' upon occasion, t' release his sight, he brushed the icicles off with a slap of his hand. All in the same state as we, Chance-Cove an' Hook-an'-Line punts passed us the while, sodden with ice, pullin' into the teeth o' the gale—crews o' Sammy Luff an' ol' Pat Hard. An' I minds that ol' Pat Hard called t' know where we was bound for an' how many dead we had aboard, there bein' two dead an' stiff already in Deacon Philip Lute's punt, says he. An' he bawled back, then, that young Jimmie Hines had give up in misery an' been cast overboard. An' thereafter, presently, Thomas Call o' Lobster Bight, workin' for shore with a rag o' barked sail, said that Alex Breed o' Rough-an'-Tumble, my cousin's husband, had foundered, with all hands perished. An' Richard Dalton, passin' t' le'ward, him with the crooked back, yelled down the wind that George Bart o' Chance Cove was cast away

with his three sons, an' 'twas rumored, says he, that a Telltale Island crew was adrift an' drivin' t' sea with the floe, an' could not be found by their mates.

A squall o' wind struck Crooked Dick's punt.

"Look!" says George Salt. "Oh, dear me!"

Crooked Dick's punt went over. When we had come about an' pulled up t' that place, there was no sign o' Crooked Dick, or his crew, or his punt.

"Went down like lead, poor men!" says Uncle Mark.

We bore away with the wind.

"God's pity!" thinks I. "'Twill be a catastrophe this night such as old men tells of!"

I knowed then, with Crooked Dick an' his crew gone chokin' an' cold t' the bottom o' the sea, flung from life t' death in a flash—I knowed then that the wind was abroad like a foe in earnest. Death stalked the sea with his great nets o' wind an' frost flung out for the souls o' men—oh, I knowed that well enough!

'Twas blowin' a blizzard afore we cotched up with the floe, which was drivin' off shore then, with the sea swellin' beneath an' tumblin' the pans about; an' the snow blinded our search for my father—the mist o' snow an' spindrift an' dusk. We skirted the edge o' the ice, all the while callin' his name—George Salt cryin' "Ahoy, John Tumm!" an' me bawlin' "Father, oh, ahoy, father!" with all the breath I could wrest from the gale as it jumped

past. Breathin' deep o' the frost, for a full-throated hail, an' breathin' deep again, yet again an' again, we come into peril o' freezin' our lungs. An' my Uncle Mark commanded us t' draw breath through our nostrils—there t' warm it—an' be slow, too; an' by an' by he bade us cease altogether, lest we die o' gangrene o' the chest, as many a rash man had died, says he. Call as we might, we got no answer at all. The wind flung out our cries an' spread them broadcast over the floe t' win'ard—we knowed that much an' waited expectant for my father t' stumble out o' the snow; but we knowed, as well, that our hails would be mixed with the tumult o' the drivin' ice an' be concealed—the pans crunchin' an' smashin' together an' the big bergs topplin' over. An' presently, after that, havin' counseled it over, we determined that my father must perish or survive, poor man, accordin' t' the strength he had for battle, an' God help un, whilst we looked to our own lives!

We found the sea furnished with power t' overwhelm us then, an we didn't look sharp t' defeat it.

"We'll land without delay," says Uncle Mark; "an' in the mornin' we'll be here t' carry Skipper John ashore."

'Twas too much for the punt t' withstand. We must leave the sea or perish in the smother. Bein' afeared t' risk the punt in the midst o' the floe we hunted a commodious pan, in a sudden, driven ter-

ror, t' save ourselves alive from the sea an' the frost, an' made t' haul the punt out on the ice.

"Fetch the ax," says Uncle Mark.

" 'Tis aft with you," says George.

"I'm froze to the thwart," says Uncle Mark. "I can't stir a inch.'

I begun t' chop un free.

"Easy!" says he.

'Twas hard t' wield the ax an' strike true in the heave an' wallow o' the sea.

"Mind my leg, ye dunderhead!" says he. "Ye'll cleave it through!"

"There now," says I.

He ripped hisself loose an' stood up.

"Fetch my beard a wallop," says he. " 'Tis froze t' my jacket an' I can't lift my head."

I cracked his great beard out o' bondage with all the care I could command. 'Twas painful to un, I fancy, as I looks back. I mind that he growled "Ouch!" an' "Aouw!" in a temper with me afore I had done. Anyhow I broke his beard free without stavin' in his chest, an' struck the ice from his legs an' the icicles from his cap. An' then from the lee of a point of our pan we hauled the punt out o' the water an' turned it over for shelter from the wind.

"You got any o' them lucifers left?" says Uncle Mark t' George Salt, when he was stowed away.

George fumbled in his weskit pocket.

"I got a plenteous supply, Skipper Mark," says he. "I 'low I'll have a smoke."

"Oh, no, you won't!" says Uncle Mark.

"I tells you, sir," says George, "I got plenty an' t' spare. Why, I 'low I must have——"

Uncle Mark turns on him.

"Never you mind how many you haves," he says. "There'll be no lucifers wasted on pipes this night. 'Twill be bitin' cold here afore long. An' the wind's blowin' high, lad—the wind's blowin' high!"

II

IN THE LEE OF THE PUNT

WELL, now, dark fell thick. 'Twas snowin' prodigally, too. We cowered in the lee o' the punt, squattin' on our haunches, close together, our knees drawed up an' our heads down. An' then we begun t' wait for the mornin', with the wind roarin' past an' curlin' down over the edge o' the punt an' creepin' under the punt t' wind about us—silent, all of us, presently, bein' too cold an' dull an' miserable for talk. A long, long time, an hour maybe, blowed the length of its tale o' frosty minutes an' left the measure of its snow in drifts upon us. I counted up t' sixty t' test the speed o' the night: "One, two, three, four, five, six"—a measured minute, ticked off like a clock. 'Twas a long minute. "Man alive!" thinks I; the length of it's nothin' short o' fearful! I wonders," thinks I, "what time o' night it can be!"

'Twas early enough—eight o'clock maybe, or half after that. We had the whole night t' live through —nine o'clock, ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, midnight, one o'clock in the mornin', an' all the dismal hours beyond; an' I fancied, bein' near new, after

all, t' the hardship o' life, that not one of us would win through alive t' the dawn. Still an' all, we was well bestowed. When I thought o' my father, alone an' shelterless, I grieved for he an' was grateful for our bit o' cosy lee. An' maybe he was dead an' well out of it, thinks I, an' we'd all perish t'gether, anyhow, an' what matter?

By an' by Uncle Mark says:

"Isn't no sense in perishin' without a struggle, is there?"

"I'm fallin' wonderful sleepy, sir," says I.

"An we don't look out," says George Salt, "we'll freeze an' know nothin' about it."

"I'm all for a caper," says Uncle Mark.

"Me, too," says George.

Well, we capered.

"I'm winded," says Uncle Mark. "Is you warm, my son?"

"I isn't the least bit warm," says I.

"Me neither," says George.

"Hum!" says Uncle Mark.

We capered again—jus' leaped an' galloped in a stumblin' way; an' we kep' within hand touch o' the punt lest we stray an' be lost in the dark. Man alive, the wind was big an' bitter!

"Warm?" says Uncle Mark.

"Not me, sir," says I.

"I'm chilled t' the bones," says George. "Is you warm, Skipper Mark?"

"Dear me, no!"

"We'll caper some more," says George.

"I'm not able for it," says Uncle Mark. "The wind tears the breath out o' my chest an' the snow is fair chokin' me t' death."

Uncle Mark was wore out an' gaspin'. 'Twas plain the ol' man could bear no more. He bade us carry on with it an' hisself crawled under the punt t' rest; an' as for we, says he, we must caper all the more t' start the blood, whilst he rested.

"When you're hot," says he, "come in an' warm me up."

George Salt spoke in my ear.

"He've gone in there t' die," says he.

"Oh, not t' die!"

"Ay," says he; "'tis his purpose t' slip away. Come now, we'll defeat it!"

With that, then, we went round an' round the punt, leapin' vigorously an' swingin' our arms, so that the ice was shed from our clothes in flakes an' we moved dry an' with ease. By that time we was in a glow o' warmth—I minds that I was sweatin' a dew; an' I called t' George Salt, afeared that if I sweated myself wet the frost would strike in an' freeze my underclothes afore I dried off—called t' George that I was hot enough for the purpose an' bade un come in with me t' Uncle Mark. It heartened Uncle Mark somewhat t' have us near. We snuggled as close t' the shiverin' ol' man as we could, an' wrapped our arms about un; but 'twas no great heat that we communicated, if any at all,

an' what heat we had, with the wind curlin' down over the edge o' the punt an' creepin' in below, was soon expended. Pretty soon we began t' shiver an' t' clutch one another close—the three of us t'gether; an' we give in then, an' called the expedient a sad failure. I minds a queer thing about it, too: When we sought t' go asunder, we found ourselves sealed fast, the one t' the other an' all t'gether—we had warmed the frozen spindrift in Uncle Mark's jacket an' trousers to a brief meltin', which had frozen again, look you. An' I had t' rip my arms an' legs loose from Uncle Mark t' be free of un, an' George Salt had to, too.

"I'll find the ax," says George.

"Ye won't!" says Uncle Mark.

"Will too!" says George.

"I wouldn't do it," says Uncle Mark. "'Tis not yet time for desperate measures. 'Twill be worse by an' by. Bide a while in patience, George——"

"Where's that ax?"

Dear man! Well, well, well! Had it come t' that?

"We're doin' well enough as it is," says Uncle Mark.

"I wants that ax."

"Let the worse come t' the worst," says Uncle Mark, "afore you——"

That was like my Uncle Mark an' my father—thus t' wish t' let the worst come t' the worst afore they spent what they had t' fend it off.

"Grapple round for that ax," says George. "I must have it at once."

'Twas jus' like my Uncle Mark t' counsel desperate waitin' t' the end. I knowed he'd do it.

"Ah, wait!" says he. "The need's not full as yet. You're a wonderful waster, George. In an hour——"

'Twas I that found the ax in the dark.

"Give it here," says George.

"Go easy, George," says Uncle Mark. "You've got t' get poor Skipper John home in the mornin'."

"Hut!" says George.

"Well, then," says Uncle Mark, "take the 'midships thwart first. 'Twill serve for a little while. Jus' a little bit o' heat," says he, "strikin' back against the floor o' the punt an' fillin' the lee——"

George ripped a thwart off.

"Oh, dear!" says Uncle Mark. "That's awful!"

"Got t' have a fire here," says George, "or perish. Anyhow," says he, "there'll be a steam vessel t' the rescue in the mornin'. We'll not need the punt. There's more men than we cast away on the floe; an' the floe's driftin' t' sea like a chip in a gale. They'll search this here ice far an' wide for the livin' an' the dead; an' they'll find us—in one state or t'other."

George had the 'midships thwart pried off by that time. All the while that he talked he was splittin' the dry spruce board t' splinters in the dark. An' I minds that my Uncle Mark bade un watch his

fingers, lest he chop them off in error, an' conserve the splinters with care, lest some fly away, an' be lost. George proclaimed an' vowed that he would make match wood o' the half o' the thwart —'twas dry an' would cotch fire from the first lucifer he struck, says he, no matter about the draft o' wind that crept under the punt. An' he'd have a fire t' warm us clear t' the heart within, says he, an' keep us alive until mornin', says he, if the punt lasted that long t' burn.

'Twas shockin' t' think o' burnin' the punt; an' Uncle Mark groaned with the grief of it. 'Twas fatal, says he, t' cast ourselves away on the floe with no means o' makin' the shore; an' 'twas a prodigal act not commanded in the present by our need. Yet Uncle Mark was woeful cold hisself—his teeth was bitin' his words in two an' he fair rattled in the chills that run over un. An' I knowed that George Salt had the right o' the thing, for my Uncle Mark was a savin' man, look you, though not a mean one—jus' a old man in fear o' the future, whom life had taught never t' spend what he had, whatever it might be, until he could keep it no longer in the need that was upon un.

Well, then, Uncle Mark says:

"Got her near ready, George?"

"Jus' a minute, Skipper Mark," says George. "I'm feelin' for my matches now."

"If we're t' have a fire," says Uncle Mark, "the sooner the better." He laughed. 'Twas a brief

laugh—bit in half as he snapped an' clenched his teeth in a chill. "If I chills much more," says he, "I'll shake my ol' hulk t' fragments."

George struck a match. It went out. He felt in his weskit pocket for another. We waited.

"Wind struck it," says George.

"Sure you got another?" says Uncle Mark.

"I got plenty," says George. "Anyhow," says he then, "I got several."

"I wouldn't waste them, George."

"I won't, Skipper Mark."

It seemed t' me that the next match George struck was damp. 'Twas a mere glow. I was troubled. George throwed the dead shaft into the snow.

"I wouldn't throw them sticks away," says Uncle Mark. "They're good firewood."

George chuckled.

"All right, sir," says he.

"You got another match?" says I.

"You got another?" says Uncle Mark.

George struck another match. It flamed. In the light of it I seed that he had a little heap o' yellow splinters all ready t' touch with fire. They was split fine. George had his bare hands round the flame o' the match. He moved them with care toward the shreds o' dry spruce. Jus' the same, a draft o' wind, curlin' over the edge o' the punt, searched out that little flame an' blowed it out. Dear man, I was troubled!

"I feel moved t' damn the wind!" says George.

"You got another match?" says Uncle Mark.

"I is."

"That's good!"

As for me, bearin' in mind that George had said he had but several more, I says:

"I hopes there's no mistake."

"Oh, there isn't no mistake!" says George. "I got matches enough t' light the fire. An' what's more," says he, "the next match that I strikes will do the trick. You may lay t' that!"

"Wonderful high wind," says Uncle Mark.

"Creeps under the punt," says I, "as sly as a snake."

"Never you fear," says George. "I'm an old hand at smokin', an' I knows how t' light a lucifer match in the wind. This here match will start that fire."

It did not.

"I feels jus' impelled t' damn this here wind!" says George.

"That match was damp," says I.

"Got another?" says Uncle Mark.

"Yep."

We waited.

"Here she goes!" says George.

She went out.

"Damn this here wind anyhow!" says George.

"I'm nervous," says Uncle Mark. "There's been a fearful waste o' matches. How many more matches you got, George?"

"I don't know, Skipper Mark."

"Well, then," says Uncle Mark, "you count an' see."

"I'm scared to," says George. "That's the truth. I got two more matches in my hand anyhow. One o' them matches will light this fire. I'm goin' t' be jus' as careful as I'm able."

George scratched the match. Nothin' happened. Though I could see nothin' in the dark, I 'lowed, then, that George was makin' t' try again, an' I wished, somehow, with all my might, that he would delay.

"Wait!" says Uncle Mark.

George was a reckless fellow in all things. 'Twas jus' like un t' plunge in an' sink or swim. I wished he'd be careful.

"No sense in waitin'," says he.

"Afore you strikes," says Uncle Mark, "you better count——"

"I don't want t' count," says George. "I got two matches in my hand. That's all I want t' know. I might get nervous if I knowed I had no more."

A gust o' wind was blowin' past.

"Wait 'til the wind drops," says Uncle Mark. "I wouldn't risk it now, George."

George waited.

"Now!" says I.

The match went out.

"Quick!" says Uncle Mark. "'Tis near calm!"

George struck the second match. It sizzled; it burned blue; it begun t' crackle an' flare.

"Sh-sh-sh!" says George. "Hush-sh-sh!"

In the quiet o' the wind George thrust the flame into the midst o' the dry splinters. They cotched fire. Presently the heap was red an' roarin'. George pried off the for'ard thwart an' split it up. By an' by the lee o' the punt began t' warm up in the blaze. We looked for comfort; no great measure o' heat, t' be sure; jus' enough, it might be, t' dry us off—the spindrift o' the afternoon had not soaked deep afore it froze in our jackets—an' t' hearten us by contrast with the dark an' loneliness an' mortal cold o' the night. The punt lay on her starboard gunwale, with her back t' the wind, an' overhung us above. When George Salt an' me had gone out an' packed the snow tight below, we was in no bad way, cast away in a gale o' wind like that gale o' wind. An' then, bein' well t' do ourselves, we begun t' talk o' my poor father, lost an' shelterless on the floe, whilst we kep' on burnin' up the punt.

My Uncle Mark was restored. 'Twasn't long afore he an' all of us was dry an' hearty. Then Uncle Mark prayed for the health o' my father, since 'twas the best effort we could make in behalf o' that poor man—whereupon, t' make sure that the intercession was importunate, as commanded, he prayed again. An' after that, my father bein' notorious hard t' kill, an' we Newf'un'landers hope-

ful in adversity, Uncle Mark spun yarns o' the gales o' his youth. 'Twas not as comfortable in the lee o' the punt as in a Rough-an'-Tumble kitchen of a winter's night; 'twould be but a dull clod, or a rash young fool, too lively for adventure —listenin' now, eyes wide, t' my tale o' the last lucifer—that would divest our state of its hardship an' mortal peril. Dear man, we was tossin' about at that time like a ship at sea! The gale was blowin' past fit t' tear a man's beard out by the roots; 'twas as cold as the pit—as wild as the depths o' hell with black wind—an' the floe was fleein' t' sea in a crowdin', howlin' agony o' haste. Times were, in the swirl o' the pans, when we was surrounded with ice—the floe was shiftin' all the while in the press—an' times were when we was t' win'ward o' the pack—the hindmost that the devil takes in a flight—with spray flyin' past an' the sea curlin' over the edge of our pan an' reachin' t' swamp our fire an' carry our punt away.

"You're holdin' out very well, Skipper Mark," says George.

"Oh, me!" says Uncle Mark. "Why, I'm doin' well enough, dear man! All I'm afeared of is that a sea will break over this here pan."

Spray fell like hail on the punt.

"There!" says Uncle Mark. "That was near enough!"

"I 'low that that sea did break on the pan," says George.

"Think so?"

We waited t' see.

"I feels water," says I. "'Tis seepin' under the punt in a little stream."

"Nothin' t' matter," says George.

"Oh, no!" says I. "Jus' a drop or two."

"Won't do nothin'," says George, "but melt the snow an' let a draft o' air in."

"Sure, no," says I.

"You damp?"

"Nothin' t' count."

"Must have been a wonderful big sea," says George. "I 'low we won't have another like that."

"Still an' all," says Uncle Mark, "I wish this here pan would work itself into the floe."

"Well," says George, "'twouldn't do no harm t' be away from the water. If a whoppin' big sea should come along an'——"

"True," says Uncle Mark.

"Ay," says I.

What was mere fret an' frother in the first o' the gale was now a wild temper, big with black power an' intention. We had drove far out t' sea. The wind had whipped up the open water between the coast an' the floe—the vast, bare stretch o' heavy water—an' the big seas, rollin' out from shore, slipped under the ice an' swelled on t' spend themselves in the midst o' the floe beyond, tumblin' the pans about in their passage. The pan we had shipped on, so t' speak, was on the win'ward edge

o' the floe, close t' the open. She wasn't ridin' on an even keel. The seas slipped beneath an' canted her—pitched her an' tossed her. By times, she was as steep as a roof an' as slippery as grease; an' as the sea worked up, rollin' higher an' higher—midnight drawin' on—an' as the ice labored an' heaved more an' more in the wallow my heart stopped an' waited sometimes t' see what would happen when the pan tipped deep an' high. An' then I flattened my hands on the ice, an' I tried t' dig my heels in, as a man will t' keep from slidin' down a steep.

It felt sometimes when the win'ward edge hesitated aloft that if the pan tipped another inch, jus' a wee mite more, we'd slide off in a flash, punt an' fire an' all, an' drop into the sea. An' when the ice fell flat, as the sea left it, 'twas much like the end of a sad nightmare. What with this trouble an' the fear of a breakin' sea we had enough t' distract us.

Well, it come. Afore long a sea dropped on the pan, swamped the fire, an' swung the punt. All at once 'twas pitch dark.

"You there?" says Uncle Mark.

"I'm safe," says I.

"So'm I," says Uncle Mark.

"Nobody carried away," says George.

"Is you wet?" says Uncle Mark.

"Not so very, sir."

"Is you, Skipper Mark?"

"Well," says Uncle Mark, "I—I—I'm damp."

I begun t' whimper. 'Twas dreadful t' think o' Uncle Mark bein' damp in a frost like that.

"What'll we do now?" says I.

"We'll have another fire," says George. "That's what we'll do, my son. An' we'll have it quick too."

"Got t' have a fire somehow," says Uncle Mark, "or perish."

"Oh, we'll soon have another fire!" says George.

"You got the ax, George?" says Uncle Mark.

"I isn't," says George; "but I soon will have."

"'Tis about here somewheres," says I, "if we can find it in the dark."

"George!" says Uncle Mark.

"Sir?"

"Is you got a match?"

"Oh," says George, "I 'low I got enough matches t' light a fire with, an' I'm watchful."

"Is they dry?"

"I'm not wet about the waist. I 'low they're dry enough. Come now! We'll find the ax."

We scrambled about on the wet ice, on hands an' knees, in search o' the ax. The ice was not wet long, though. The water froze fast. We, too, was like t' freeze fast t' the pan. 'Twas sticky as glue with frost. I minds I rested once—jus' a pause—an' when I made t' move again my mitts an' knees, an' the toes o' my sealhide boots was froze t' the pan, an' I had some slight ado t' wrest them loose.

We was wet, true—yet not wet beyond hope, with a fire to dry us. Had we been soaked t' the hides of us, fire or no fire—drippin' wet in the fatal weather that blowed through the night—the frost would have done us all t' death, with short shrift of our sins. Look you! When the sea fell we sprang fast to our feet; but Uncle Mark, bein' stiff with years an' misery, was cotched below somewhat, in the flood o' water. Let that be as it may, an' whatever an' all about it, we was wet enough for dismal fear o' the issue; an' we searched for that ax in the dark with the patience an' cunnin' wiles o' men doomed by the loss of it. I'm not knowin' how long we searched. 'Twas an anxious occupation, anyhow—an' a cold one—feelin' an' sweepin' over the ice, with the wind bitin' us like fire. True enough, too—ay, that's very good—we cowered from the wind like men come too close to a blisterin' blaze o' fire. Frost can burn like fire, mark you! I knows that much about the both.

"Well," says George. "I got it!"

Uncle Mark an' me crawled t' the lee o' the punt an' squatted out o' the wind, whilst George struck off a plank an' splintered it up.

"All ready," says George. "I'll have a fire in a jiffy."

"Be savin' o' them matches," says Uncle Mark.

"Never you fear about that, Skipper Mark," says George. "I've learned my lesson."

"I'm glad o' that," says Uncle Mark.

"Make haste!" says I. "I'm freezin' t' death."

Quite a little while passed. I was troubled. An' soon I begun t' fret.

"What's the matter, George?" says Uncle Mark.

"I isn't got no matches," says George. "That's what's the matter, Skipper Mark."

III

THE ULTIMATE ECONOMY

ALL this while my father was in a very poor way o' comfort an' security. 'Twas a mean chance that he had for his life in that thick weather. The ice was swingin' in the wind—whirlin' like a merry-go-round at the St. John's regatta, as 'twere. There was no tellin' where was the tickle t' Rough-an'-Tumble, whence would issue our punt, an' he could search the circle o' the gale for but a few fathoms at best. 'Twas a great flight ashore—men o' Chance Cove an' Anchor Bight an' Rough-an'-Tumble Harbor racin' for their punts an' puttin' out in daft terror to elude the wind; but my father fell in with no men t' carry un home.

When the gale shut down he was clingin' t' the edge o' the floe, waitin' for rescue in a mist o' snow. An' when the snow thickened to a cloud, with no rescue in sight, he made inland o' the ice, in the last light he could crawl in, where the floe was packed an' dry o' flyin' spray. An' there he rested alone in the lee of a little clumper until he was stiff an' listless with frost. An' then—it bein'

near midnight by that time, an' we three men, me an' George Salt an' my Uncle Mark, spinnin' yarns in the red lee of our punt, t' win'ward o' my father's shelter—he run back an' forth behind the clumper t' stir his blood, but did not venture into the wind that was blowin' down from we.

By an' by my father sniffed.

"That's queer," thinks he.

Then he sniffed again.

"It can't be true," thinks he. "I must be goin' mad with misery an' desire. I 'low," thinks he, "that I'm jus' sensin' what I wants t' find."

With that he commanded hisself; an' he kep' on runnin' back an' forth in the lee o' the clumper, an' would not attend t' the clamor of his nostrils. But presently he stopped t' sniff. 'Twas impossible t' withstand the hint in the air.

"Smells like smoke," thinks he.

Well, then, he throwed back his head, an' he breathed slow an' deep o' the wind, drawin' the full o' his big chest through his nose.

"Spruce," thinks he.

An' he reasoned.

" 'Tis smoke, sure enough!" thinks he. "There's a fire near by t' win'ward! Somebody's burnin' up a punt!"

My father run into the gale an' looked t' win'-ward. The night was thick with snow, as I've told you, an' as black as a wolf's throat. Yet there was a glow t' be perceived—low an' red an' shiftin',

like a flame in the wind. An' the glow was the light of our fire, which had come close t' my father's place; for—look you—my father's clumper was heavy an' slow t' move, an' the pans o' the floe, whipped t' racin' speed by the wind, was drivin' past, with the win'ward edge o' the ice overhaulin' that clumper all the while.

An' so my father sot out t' reach the glow that he could see; an' he must go warily or be lost. The pans was rugged an' in motion, they was great an' small, all muddled t'gether, an' they shifted perversely, bein' now in contact an' then separate in clear water; so that my poor father had a sad time of it. There was no walkin' upright in the dark; he must crawl like a beast, feelin' his way with his hands. An' all the while the gale was stingin' an' stiflin' the poor man as he crept headforemost into the teeth of it; an' all the while, too, as he drawed nearer the edge o' the ice the pans tumbled an' pitched the more. Times were when he chose false courses an' was stopped an' dumfounded by open water—times when he strayed an' lost hope—times when the gale gripped an' held un dead. An' sometimes the drift o' the ice fetched our pan close—sometimes it whirled the pan far away, an' the glow of our fire was dim in the snow.

At last my father come within hail. So near was he, then, that he could make us out in the red light.

"Ahoy!" he bawled.

We did not hear. 'Twas too windy for my

father's voice t' beat up through the gale. My father could see us plain—'twas no more than a few fathoms o' distance; he could hear us talk an' knowed the yarns of his youth that my Uncle Mark was spinnin' t' hearten our courage; he could see us grin in response t' my uncle's humor; but he could not make us hear his cries. An' he bawled an' bawled, standin' on the edge o' the pan, with a breach o' black water between.

An' there he waited, crouched in the spindrift from the big seas that had begun t' break over us —jus' waited for the pans t' come close enough for un t' chance a leap an' make an end of it one way or t'other.

Well, now, when the big sea curled over the pan an' swamped our fire there was sadness an' coil enough for anybody; an' the outlook was too black for easy belief—an' so I confess. You may not take t' my tale o' the last lucifer—I'll not praise it myself lest I shame my modesty and show too bold a conceit for your taste; an' you may think the tale nothin' better than a wild yarn, spun t' startle you. Yet 'tis a wild coast in March weather—the floe is spread with nip-an'-tuck predicaments; an' life an' death go hand in hand abroad of it, as everybody knows. I choose brisk tales t' tell. Why not? I tells them, too, with skill, in a way t' please my fancy. Why not? I'd be but a poor teller o' tales otherwise, an' you'd call me a dull fellow an'

give me no heed at all. Anyhow, my tale o' the last lucifer is true t' the life I've lived; an' 'tis by no means the queerest tale I could tell, an' never go beyond the truth by a hair's breadth, an you put me t' the full test o' my experience an' capacity. Sadness an' coil enough for anybody that night, as I've told you—ay, an' indeed—with my father crouched on his pan, minded t' leap in the dark, an' me an' George Salt an' my Uncle Mark huddled in the black lee of our punt, our matches spent—we all damp an' shiverin' an' doomed t' freeze solid as stone in the frost afore long.

George Salt was wonderful doleful.

"Dear me, oh, dear me!" says he. "My waste has murdered us every one!"

"You pry in that weskit pocket again," says Uncle Mark.

"No use, Skipper Mark."

"Anyhow," says Uncle Mark, "you jus' try."

"My fingers is frosted," says George. "I've had my hands bare too much."

"Froze?"

"Jus' frosted stiff an' numb."

"Leave me feel in your pocket," says I.

"No use."

"No harm in tryin'," says I. "I might discover the piece of a match."

"I could never button my jacket again."

"I'll button it for you."

"You'll frost your hands."

"Well," says I, "I'll risk it! Come, now, leave me feel in your pocket!"

"An you will," says George. "'Tis no use though."

There wasn't a shred of a match in George Salt's pocket. I feeled about most conscientiously an' it cost me a numb hand t' prove the lack.

"Nothin' there," says I.

"Well, then, all we can do," says Uncle Mark, "is jus' wait here an' see what comes of it. You boys," says he, "better keep movin' about. I'm too tired. I'll—I'll jus' keep restin' quietly under the punt."

"Man, you'll die there!" says George.

"An my time's come," says Uncle Mark, "I've no complaint t' make."

We said nothin' t' that. 'Twasn't no use.

"Stir about!" says Uncle Mark. "Stir about, you boys! Somehow or other I'm feelin' perfectly easy an' comfortable," says he, "an' you needn't worry none about me."

"We isn't goin' t' leave you there t' die," says George.

"Ah, please!" says Uncle Mark.

"No, sir!"

"I'm tired an' sleepy, George!"

"No matter," says George. "We won't do it. You get right up, Skipper Mark, an' come out here t' once like a man."

By this time the pan had worked a space into

the floe. 'Twas not heavin' as it had done. There was ice t' win'ward of us. More, too, the snow had thinned—'twas still curlin' over the edge o' the punt with the wind, t' be sure, but was no longer thick as dust. An' I fancied, as well, that the gale had lost its slap, but could not be sure o' that. Whatever an' all, 'twould be easier now t' leap about on the pan. A careful man need not caper in fear o' bein' lost in the snow or slidin' off into the sea.

"Come out o' that!" says George.

Uncle Mark whimpered a bit.

"Oh, pshaw!" says he. "Won't you please jus' leave me alone here an' let me——"

My father crawled under the punt then.

"Who's this?" says George.

"Me," says my father. "Where's Son?"

"I'm safe," says I.

"I knows you is," says he.

My father felt around in the dark for me an' put his hand on my shoulder for a minute. I was wonderful pleased with that.

"All right, is you?" says he.

"Yep," says I.

My father crawled out an' begun to tug at a black bulk in the snow. 'Twas a queer thing t' do.

"Who's that you got with you?" says George.

"I isn't got nobody with me," says my father.

"Well, then, what you got with you?"

"I got a dead swile with me. I stumbled over it

on the edge o' your pan an' fetched it along for fuel an' food. Anybody hungry?"

"Forbear!" says George. "I'm achin' with hunger."

That's jus' the way I felt too. When I thought o' food my hand jus' jumped amidships an' pressed hard t' stifle the pain.

"We'll have a juicy chunk o' swile meat sizzlin' here in the fire afore long," says my father. Nobody said nothin' t' that. As for me, I jus' pressed my 'midships section an' grieved.

"Take heart now, all o' you," says my father.

"Juicy chunk o' swile meat?" says poor George.

"Ay."

"An' sizzlin'?"

"Nothin' like it," says my father, "t' put the heart in a man on a cold night. An' as for fuel," says he, "the fat o' this here swile will serve until mornin'."

My Uncle Mark broke in.

"You is alive after all, John," says he. "I'm at ease about you now. Where in tarnation did you come from anyhow?"

"I leaped aboard your pan," says my father. "I been close t' you for an hour an' I couldn't make you hear. I falled in when I leaped. My feet an' legs is all wet. Why don't you light your fire again? The pan's drifted away from the water. There won't be no seas break aboard it."

"No matches," says George.

"Ecod!" says my father. "That's awful!"

"What did you do, sir," says I, "with the match George Salt give you this mornin'?"

"I picked my teeth with it."

"You throwed it away?"

My father was a savin' man. I 'lowed he had the remnant o' that match stowed away somewheres.

"'Tis in my weskit pocket," says he.

"You kep' it!" says George. "Well, well!"

"One o' my teeth haves been wonderful bad o' late," says my father. "I 'lowed I might have need o' that match again."

"Did you employ her again?"

"No call to."

"Do you 'low you done much damage the first time you used her?"

"I didn't do no damage at all. My tooth——"

"Didn't spoil her?"

"Spoil her? The match? I 'low not."

George reflected.

"Skipper John," says he, "you don't recollect nothin' peculiar happenin', do you, when you picked your teeth with that match?"

"No, George."

"Think well," says George.

My father thought well, as he was bid.

"No," says he. "Why? I don't recollect nothin' in any way peculiar."

"Didn't taste no sulphur?"

"I didn't taste nothin' but pine wood."

"Whew!" says George. "That's a vast relief! I'll wager she's as sound as ever she was. Where is she, Skipper John?"

"Restin' safe in my weskit pocket."

"You isn't pried into your weskit pocket, is you, t' make sure that she didn't slip overboard?"

"That match," says my father, "is jus' where I put her when I stowed her away."

"She might have falled out."

"I'm a methodical man," says my father. "When I stows a thing away against a time o' need, I'm cautious; an' I'm always able t' find it when I wants it. That match is in my weskit pocket. I'm sure of it."

"Skipper John," says George, "the fire is all set an' ready for that there match."

My father brooded.

"Wonderful windy," says he.

"I'm thinkin'," says I, "that the wind has fallen."

"She's droppin' away, sure enough," says George. "'Twill fall calm an' cold afore mornin'."

"Isn't so very much sweep t' the wind," says I.

"Still an' all," says my father, "'twould be quite a trick t' light a fire with one match in a wind like this."

"Well," says George, "we got t' try."

"An' waste the only match we got?"

"We might not waste it."

"Might not!" says my father. "I wants t' be sure that we won't. How you feelin', George?"

"I'm all right."

"How is you, my son?"

"I'm hearty."

"Brother Mark," says my father, "is you feelin' —pretty perky still?"

"I'm farin' well enough for the time," says Uncle Mark. "I been heartened since you come."

"Able t' hold out a while as you is?"

"Oh, I'm able t' hang on!"

"Well," says my father, "I 'low we better wait until the wind drops down afore we strike this last lucifer. We isn't so forlorn as we might be. An' by an' by we'll have a roarin' hot fire for sure, an' jus' as much sizzlin' hot swile meat as we cares t 'eat. Eh?" says he. "How's that?"

"Better not take no risk," says Uncle Mark.

"I'm agreed," says George. "The wind's droppin' fast. We can light that fire whenever we wants to."

"Ay," says I; "that's common sense an' caution."

"Well, then," says my father, "we'll wait!"

Well, now, as I looks back, I'm not knowin', t' tell the truth about it, whether the wind was droppin', jus' then, or not. 'Twas a wild, bitter gale—that gale o' wind an' snow—an' 'twas still roarin' past, curlin' down over the edge o' the punt, an' creepin' beneath as sly as a snake, an' as swift t" dart. Thomas Luke o' Chance Cove, him that lived the night through on the rock called Ol'

Wives' Lee, with his arm broke an' his feet froze solid, holds that the wind fell afore his wee son died. An' there's other castaways o' the gale that hang with his contention—John Watt o' Chain Harbor, an' his crew, who spent the night adrift, with five dead men in the skiff in the mornin'; an' Sandy Mull o' Lobster Bight, cast away on Blacksmith Point with his fellows; but the lost Telltale Island men maintain that the wind blowed over the floe without mitigation—that their dead died near dawn in the full sweep of it. I don't know about that. It seemed t' me, anyhow, as I minds it now, that the gale was exhausted, whilst we waited for it t' fail, measurin' every gust that swept past; an' I 'lowed in my heart that 'twouldn't be so very long afore my father would strike the last lucifer an' provide us with plenty o' fire an' food.

As for fuel, we had enough. There was no fear o' comin' t' the last red coal—snugglin' over it t' gather the last of its heat afore it turned black an' cold in the night. With the punt t' burn, an' with splinters o' the punt t' flare in swile fat, like big candles, we should do very well, once we had the fire alight. Swile fat! Dear man, I was hungry! An' I kep' thinkin' all the while that the swile meat would soon be sizzlin' in a hot blaze; an' by that I was heartened t' wait. Jus' a little while, thinks I—jus' a little while longer. 'Twouldn't be long, thinks I, afore my father would strike that lucifer; an' he'd be cautious an' make a sure success of it,

too, thinks I—that was my father's way—an' pretty soon we'd all bask in the glow o' the fire an' smell sizzlin' swile meat.

'Twas a draggin' time, though—thus waitin' an' waitin' an' waitin'; an' 'twas laborious t' pass. We stirred about t' keep as warm as we was able, lest a desperate distress overtake us an' compel my father t' chance the match in the wind. My Uncle Mark crawled out, too, an' done the best that he could, with we t' slap un an' urge un on. I 'lowed he was better off than he had been, an' my father thought so, too, when Uncle Mark went under the punt t' rest; but George Salt didn't jump with us at all about that.

"What o'clock do you 'low it is?" says my father.

"Somewheres about one o'clock in the mornin'," says George.

"One o'clock in the mornin'!" says my father. "You're daft, George. 'Tis later than that."

"Time drags," says George, "in a case like this."

"Must be near dawn."

"Makin' allowances for misery an' waitin'," says George, "I opine 'tis not beyond two o' the clock. Skipper Mark can't live through t' dawn without a fire."

We crawled under the punt.

"How you feelin' now, Mark?" says my father.

"Fair enough," says Uncle Mark. "I'm still alive."

"Ye're lyin'," says George, "about how you feels.

Fair enough, eh? You're near dead, Skipper Mark."

"Oh, no, I isn't neither!" says Uncle Mark.

"I'm for a fire right away," says George.

"Too windy," says Uncle Mark. "A match wouldn't live t' light the fire."

"Wind's droppin' fast," says my father.

"I dispute ye," says George. "'Twon't drop no more."

"Don't you strike that match yet!" says Uncle Mark.

"I won't," says my father.

"Ye will!" says George.

"George," says I, "you isn't seed that match. 'Tis all whittled away. 'Tis a mere remnant."

"'Tis the only match we got," says Uncle Mark, "an' our lives hang on it. 'Twould be folly t' risk it in this wind. True enough, I may perish afore the wind drops, an' I'll not deny that. So be it, then, an be it must. Jus' the same, my wisdom goes contrary t' strikin' that match jus' now. 'Twould go out. An' suppose you struck it an' it did go out? I'd die all the sooner. Either way, maybe, I mus' perish. But I'm not 'lowin' t' perish—I'm 'lowin' t' hang on until the wind drops an' you can strike that match in security. All the while, as I'm waitin' here, I'm thinkin' o' fire an' food. 'Tis jus' that that heartens me up when my courage runs low in the midst of a chill. 'Tis the hope o' snugglin' up t' the fire an' settin' my teeth in a hunk

o' sizzlin' swile meat that keeps me alive. If the match blows out an' if I can brood no longer on the fire an' meat I'm t' have when the wind drops I'll die right away. You had small success, George, when you lit the first fire. I'm for waitin' a while longer. An' that's all about it."

"Jus' so," says George. "I'll wait."

We waited a long time. By an' by George got wonderful uneasy. I wished he'd be patient.

"'Tis time now," says George.

"Not yet," says my father.

We waited again. It seemed a wonderful long time. I don't know how long 'twas.

"Wind's droppin'," says I.

"Ay," says my father, "'twon't be long now."

"I won't wait another minute," says George. "I'm cold an' I'm hungry—I'm sick an' tired o' waitin'. Where's that match, Skipper John? I'm a heavy smoker, used t' lightin' matches in the wind, an' I can make the best fist of any of us with this one. Pass that match, Skipper John!"

"Don't you strike that match!" says Uncle Mark.

"Ye can't have it!" says my father.

"Whose match is it?" says George.

"'Tis my match."

"Your match, is it?" says George. "Where'd ye get it? Eh? Who give it to ye?"

My father was a proud man.

"Well an' good, George," says he. "If 'tis your match you may have it. Now, George," says he,

"I'm not cross with you. An the match is t' be struck we'll all join t'gether, as men in the same case should, an' make the best success we can. The match may blow out. An it does we'll not complain. Is you ready? I'll pass the match over."

'Twas not quite black as tar. There was a moon above the gale. A man could see his hand an he held it up—jus' a black shadow afore his face.

"Jus' a jiffy," says George. "I'll scrape these splinters o' dry spruce t'gether again."

By an' by my father says:

"All ready now?"

"I'm ready."

"Have a care!" says I. "An you drops that wee shred of a match on the ice——"

"We isn't goin' t' drop it, my son," says my father. "Where's your hand, George?"

"Here you is, Skipper John."

"I got the match between my thumb an' forefinger," says my father, "with the head stickin' out. I'll hold on until you pinches it an' says t' let go. You understand, George?"

"Ay."

"All ready, then?"

"I'm all ready."

I didn't draw a breath whilst George an' my father fetched their hands t'gether.

"Cast off," says George.

"You sure you got it?"

"I got it."

"All right," says my father; "now you go ahead an' light the fire. Can we help you, George?"

"Gather 'round me," says George, "an' fend the wind off. I'm wonderful nervous."

"Don't you strike that match!" says Uncle Mark.

"Aw, don't say that, Skipper Mark!"

"An I was you," says Uncle Mark, "I wouldn't do it!"

"Skipper John," says George, "what'll I strike it on?"

"You're all damp with snow. Strike it on the punt."

"My hands is so cold," says George. "I can't tell ice from dry wood. I'll strike it on my weskit. I'm bendin' over the splinters. Come on each side o' me now, for a shield, an' I'll do it. We'll soon have fire an' food here. I'm all shaky with cold."

"Don't you strike that match!" says Uncle Mark.

"Quit that, Skipper Mark!" says George. "I'm nervous as it is."

"Don't you strike it!"

"Command yourself, George," says my father. "Rest a bit afore you does it. You'll be able in a minute."

George rested.

"Now," says he. "I'm ready."

"Don't you do it!" says Uncle Mark.

My father got on one side o' George, an' opened his jacket an' put an arm over George's shoulder; an' I done the same thing on the other side, as well as

I was able, bein' then wonderful stiff with cold. George was shakin'. I could feel un quiver. An' then quite a while passed with nothin' said whilst George felt his weskit over for a good dry place t' strike the match on, an' settled his feet on the ice, an' gathered courage. The gale was perhaps creepin' under the punt; an' shield George as we did, an' the best that we could, I fancied that I could feel the wind flutter up. I'm not knowin' that the wind fluttered up. I don't say that it did. It may have been breathless in the lee o' the punt for all that I know. Yet it seemed t' me that I felt a flutter; an' if I felt no flutter I feared a blast—a sly, swift blast that would cotch the flame an' blow it out.

"What you waitin' for?" says my father.

"I can't do it!" says George, sobbing. "I'm afeared o' the hazard! I can't do it!"

"'Tis the work o' God!" says Uncle Mark.

"Take the match quick, Skipper John," says George. "I'm too shaken t' hold it."

"Well an' good," says my father. "We'll wait a while longer an' try again."

We settled ourselves again t' wait with patience for the wind t' fall. An' we waited an' waited an' waited. The wind flopped—no doubt about that. Afore dawn 'twas near flat calm on the floe. Yet ever we hoped 'twould fall flatter—an' we waited; an' ever the wind blowed too high for our courage—an' we waited. We suffered with cold more than ever I

fancied men could suffer an' endure t' live. Ah, 'tis too fearful t' tell—the way the frost bit an' gnawed us, huddled in the dark in the lee o' the punt. George Salt tried again with the match. 'Twas no use. He shivered so much that he scared hisself an' give up in the fear that was on him. My father made ready t' strike the match; an' he would have struck it, I fancy, come what might, had not George Salt an' Uncle Mark begged un t' desist until the wind fell a mite more. By an' by we was all in a very bad way—all dull an' silent an' reconciled t' bitterness. Had we not laid hold o' the hope o' the fire an' food that awaited us—very soon now, when the wind dropped a little more—we should have slipped away one by one. My Uncle Mark lost the feelin' of his feet—they was jus' like the feet of a dead man, says he. An' when my father an' George Salt heared him say that an' sensed the death in his voice they roused themselves, bein' two of a mind, then, t' strike the last lucifer, whether the wind blowed it out or not.

They made ready.

"You strike it, George," says my father.

"No, no!" says George. "I've lived an evil life, Skipper John, an' haves no favor Aloft. You is a pious an' goodly man. You do it."

My father paused t' pray. He took a long time about it. I wished he'd make haste.

"Strike the match, Skipper John," says George.

"Oh, strike the match, sir!" says I.

"I'm ready," says my father.

We crowded close t' my father t' fend off the least flutter o' wind. I chanced t' look out from the lee o' the punt.

"What's that light on the floe?" says I.

"Must be the dawn," says George.

"'Tis the dawn!" says Uncle Mark. "Oh, God bless us all!"

'Twas a strange, loud cry. We turned t' Uncle Mark then in alarm.

"What's the matter with you, Mark?" says my father.

What was the matter with un? He had come all at once t' the end of his store o' strength. 'Twas his last cry. The poor man was dead.

Afore dawn, as everybody knows who knows anything about this coast at all, the *Pelican* steamed out o' Twillingate Harbor, under gov'ment orders, an' began t' search out the lost. She made bad weather of it t' the floe, as the tales run; but once inside the ice, at dawn, miles an' miles away from we, she nosed about t' good purpose, though we knowed nothin' about it then. She succored the livin' an' gathered the dead—there was twenty-three dead on the ice from the harbors of our bay; an' 'twas long, long after dawn—'twas midway o' the gray mornin', indeed—when she comes close t' we an' spied our signals. We was well frosted, you may believe, when they carried us aboard—all black

an' limp an' speechless. Yet once aboard the *Pelican,* with the day drawed on toward evenin', an' we all warm an' fed an' full again, with our frost bites doctored, George Salt feeled about in his pocket, I minds well, an' searched out his 'baccy an' ol' black pipe. An' he cut his 'baccy an' rolled it as well as he could, an' chucked his pipe full, all the while in deep thoughtfulness an' gloom, an' then he feeled in his weskit pocket, accordin' to his habit, for a match, an' feeled an' feeled again, an' searched away, without any success that I could see—an' then he turned t' my father.

"Skipper John," says he, "you got a match?"

"Me?" says my father.

"Ay, Skipper John," says George; "you ought t' have a match stowed away somewheres."

My father give George Salt the last lucifer, with never a word about it.

"She's a perfectly good match," says George.

"Ay," says my father; "she shouldn't be throwed away an' wasted."

Pretty soon George Salt was puffin' like the funnel o' the mail boat.

IV

WHITE WATER

I

CONSTABLE CHARLIE'S QUEST

THERE had been a murder at Sunshine Tickle. It was still a mystery. Sunshine Tickle was terrified and subdued. Pinch-a-Penny Paul Grew, the Sunshine trader,—found dead in his office, in a black pool of his own blood, with his bald head broken open and his face contorted in a way to make the flesh of a man's back creep with horror,—was buried. A week had gone by; nobody was in custody; nobody was suspected—nobody above anybody else. As a matter of fact, if threats are sound, presumptive evidence, anybody at Sunshine Tickle, with strength enough to wield the blunt instrument supposed to have been involved in the affair, might have killed Pinch-a-Penny Paul Grew. For Pinch-a-Penny Paul, the only trader at Sunshine Tickle, with his shop and overflowing storehouses, his ugly greed and harsh talk of short rations in a famine season, had tempted every decent man of the place to the deed. An exasperated hatred of the unfeeling old extortioner had provoked the murder; there was no other conceivable motive; somebody had struck the man down in a

fit of anger. Apprehended, however, the murderer, whoever he was, whatever the provocation, would be hanged by the neck at St. John's in due time.

It was held that Pinch-a-Penny Paul Grew's miserly oppression might have overcome even a good man's piety:

"'Twas no rogue that slew un."

"No—no thief."

"No tellin' who done it."

"A church-member—maybe."

"Small blame to the poor man!"

"They'll hang un, anyhow."

"Ay."

"'Tis a sad pity!"

"Ah, well, 'tis the law o' the land. The man that killed Pinch-a-Penny Paul Grew must hang."

"If he's cotched."

"They'll cotch un."

"A vast pity!"

"Mm-hm."

"The man that hides un——"

"Isn't nobody goin' to hide un."

"Mm-hm."

"Poor man!"

Charlie Malone, constable of the Newfoundland Police, dispatched north from St. John's in haste to solve the mystery and take the criminal, landed from the mail-boat at Shout Harbor, the nearest port of call, and cast about for a craft to carry

him on. It was then mid-afternoon of a drenched, gray day; and the weather promised a foul passage of the twelve wet miles from Shout Harbor to Sunshine Tickle. Beyond the heads of Shout Harbor, the sea was running high, as Constable Charlie knew well enough, who had come in from the open—a swelling sea, black in the drab weather, with fog abroad and half a gale whipping up the white horses. It would trouble a skiff with a double reef; it would drown a punt—smother a punt in her own white dust. Constable Charlie was heartened to discover the outline and gray bulk of a launch in the harbor fog—a sportsman's motorboat, perhaps, but subject, at any rate, to requisition in the King's name; and as the urgency of his business required haste, he determined to put King's command on the owner and go reasonably to Sunshine Tickle.

As he turned from his survey of the harbor, Constable Charlie was accosted by a strapping fellow with the look of an engineer and the dialect of an outport fisherman.

"Is you the Constable?"

"I am."

"Sunshine Tickle?"

"Ay."

A glance about—a step nearer—a whisper in the Constable's ear:

"Murder?"

"That's it."

"Very good. I'm your man. I've come for you."

"Hail from Sunshine?"

"Boy an' man. Name o' Croft, sir. They calls me Toot-Toot Toby."

"What you got—a skiff?"

"Me? No sir—not me! I isn't in sail no more." Toot-Toot Toby pointed to the gray bulk in the harbor fog. "That's my boat," said he.

"Own her?"

"Prop'ty o' the late lamented Mr. Paul Grew, sir. I'm the engineer."

"Motor-boat?"

"Sir?"

"Gasoline?"

Toot-Toot Toby fixed Constable Charlie with a convincing eye. "That's a steamboat," said he.

"Is she able?"

"She's stout an' she's able."

"Will she weather what's outside?"

"She would if compelled."

"All right," said Constable Charlie briskly. "That's all I want to know. 'Tis past four o'clock. We'll get under way."

"The day?"

"Why not?"

" 'Tis not civil weather."

"But you said——"

"I said she'd weather what's outside, sir. I think she might. Maybe not the big open, sir, but jus' what lies between here an' Sunshine Tickle. No—

not the big open. I'd not like t' try it. No sir—not me! Still an' all, if it blows no worse, she'd make a lusty fight for life even there. What she might not do, sir, is round Steeple Head. I 'low you isn't heared nothin' about the Boilin' Pot in your travels?"

"I've not sailed these parts."

Toot-Toot Toby grinned.

"I 'low not," said he. "The Boilin' Pot is the long shallow off Steeple Head. It runs far out to sea. She'd never live to dodge round it. 'Twould be run it or perish. An' in a nor'east gale o' wind, the Boilin' Pot——"

"'Tis not blowing a gale."

"Blowin' high, sir."

"'Tis blowing small measure for half a gale."

"Hark!"

They listened to the wind. It sang over the hills of Shout Harbor.

"Blowin' up, sir."

"Pt! A breeze! I've just come in from it."

"Jumpin' up from the nor'east, sir. Hark to the sea, sir! 'Tis vicious."

"Would she founder?"

"I'm not sayin' she would. I'm sayin' she might."

"Well, then——"

"We'll bide in harbor, sir."

"What's this?" Constable Charlie demanded suspiciously. "Bide in harbor? 'Tis a queer thing for an outport skipper——"

"'Tis wisdom."

Constable Charlie reflected; suspicion increased; Constable Charlie had never seen the Boiling Pot in a northeast gale of wind. He had been given to understand that the murder of Paul Grew was a popular crime. Sunshine Tickle might be inclined to shield—to provide means of escape——

"Come, now!" said he sharply. "You don't want to be charged with obstructing a constable in the performance of——"

"No, sir. I don't want to obstruct no constable, an' I don't want t' be charged with nothin'."

"We'll put to sea."

"We'll do nothin' so foolish."

"In the King's name!" said Constable Charlie.

Toot-Toot Toby started. He backed a step—eye to eye with Constable Charlie. Presently his face lightened. "I sees what you means, sir," said he then. "You means that you've the law to compel me. True, sir. An' very good, too. I'm agreeable." He chuckled—broke into a great guffaw of warm laughter. And he laughed again. "I 'low you thinks I lacks courage," he said. "You come right along o' me, sir. My punt's moored to the wharf-head. We'll go aboard an' put out. 'Twill be a comical passage. She'll dance a jig in the Boilin' Pot." And he laughed again and led the way.

Forthwith they boarded the *Lady May*. Old

Elihu Maul was the pilot of the craft, under the thumb of Toot-Toot Toby Croft—called skipper by grace: Skipper Elihu Maul o' the *Lady May.* A gray old man he was: a pale, patient old codger, wearing an air of acquiescence and timidity—which belied the truth, however, for he was celebrated in those waters for swift, positive courage at sea. And he had the habit of silence—of a dull introspection, from which an emergency awakened him to action as direct and instant as a flash of lightning. Patient as he was, and as mildly inclined, it was known at Sunshine Tickle that he could strike when stirred to anger; and a proverb was spoken of him—that sleeping dogs should be let lie. When Toot-Toot Toby and Constable Charlie boarded the *Lady May,* with the astonishing notion of putting to sea, not so much as the lift of an eyebrow betrayed the old man's interest in the critical business of smashing a way to Sunshine Tickle that day. He nodded—that was all. Nor for a long time, sitting alone with Constable Charlie while Toot-Toot Toby, aft in the engine-room, encouraged the steam, did the constable's errand, frankly concerned with the man who killed Pinch-a-Penny Paul Grew, enlist Elihu Maul's curiosity.

"Constable, eh?" said he at last.

Constable Charlie nodded.

"Queer trade," Elihu observed. "I wouldn't want to be no constable."

"Why not?"

"Don't like 'em. 'Tis a mean occupation—spying into other folks' business. Now, this here murder——"

"I want that man."

"You'll not cotch un. 'Tis too deep a mystery for any constable to fathom. 'Twas done with cunnin'. The man covered his tracks."

Elihu's simplicity made Constable Charlie smile.

"'Twill be a simple matter to solve that mystery," said he. "They can't hide anything from me in a small place like Sunshine——"

"You're in mad haste to be at Sunshine," Elihu interrupted bitterly. "'Tis not fit weather to be outside."

"King's business, Skipper Elihu."

Skipper Elihu scowled.

"King's business, is it?" he grumbled. "A mean employment, that—to nab the poor man that killed ol' Paul Grew!"

"Law's law," said Constable Charlie severely.

"Hut!" Elihu scoffed. "The world's well rid o' Paul Grew."

"Who killed him?"

"I did."

Constable Charlie started.

"You?"

"In my heart—many's the time."

"'Tis well for you, Skipper Elihu," said the con-

stable grimly, "that your hand had nothing to do with it."

Skipper Elihu stared at his hand.

"Mm-hm?" said he absently. "That hand? I've knowed it t' itch, sir, to strike that ol' scoundrel —that I have! An' I'm neither afeared nor ashamed to tell it."

With that, old Elihu Maul quit the cabin abruptly and shut himself in the little wheel-house, a space or two forward of the cabin hatchway, leaving Constable Charlie to his astonished reflections. Having indulged these reflections to a conclusion, which involved old Elihu Maul in the net of his suspicion, Constable Charlie went aft to the engine-room, where Toot-Toot Toby altogether recovered from his objection to the passage to Sunshine Tickle in the sea that was running, was firing up with fervor, blithe as a boy, whistling a cheerful ballad of the coast the while.

True, it was highly improbable that old Elihu Maul had had anything to do with the murder of Pinch-a-Penny Paul Grew. It was not at all improbable, however, that he knew the author of the crime. And more than that—was it, after all, completely improbable that he had done the thing himself? Certainly he had been frank—so frank as to absolve himself from suspicion. Yet the criminal mind—a tricky thing! It assumes frankness as a blind. A man puts himself under suspi-

cion to create the impression that he has nothing to fear. Anyhow——

Toot-Toot Toby grinned when the drift of Constable Charlie's interrogation took the obvious direction of old Elihu Maul.

"Hut!" he scoffed. "'Twas not Elihu Maul."

"Maybe not. But——"

"'Twasn't Elihu Maul."

"He hated the man."

"So did I. Everybody hated un. More than once, in my time, I've been tempted to do un to death. If you convicts every man o' Sunshine Tickle that hated Paul Grew, you'll have to hang the neighborhood. As for me, I've not much blame for the man who killed un. 'Twas a foul crime, I knows—to strike down an ol' man like he. But 'twas a deed done in anger; an' I've no doubt that the man who done it is woeful sorry by this time. A mean man, Paul Grew! A robber an' a liar too! Debt, debt, debt! False books to keep us in debt, an' a foul tongue to lash us with blame! Maybe you've knowed such men in your time. 'Tis the tongue o' them—the nasty, twistin' lips an' foul sneers o' them—that provokes a man to strike in anger. Still an' all, 'twas a bloody deed. They'll hang the man that done it. They'll have to. An' no doubt they should. 'Twould not be me that would say contrary, God knows! Elihu Maul? God save us! No, no! 'Twas never Elihu Maul

that killed Pinch-a-Penny Paul Grew. I'm sure o' that much, anyhow."

"Ay, but he hated——"

"Damme!" Toot-Toot Toby burst out. "Isn't I jus' tol' you that I hated un too? 'Tis no evidence at all."

"He's glad the old man's dead. He says so. He means it. And——"

"How long is you been a constable?"

"A matter of seven years."

"Don't you know no better than to think that the man who killed Paul Grew is glad he done it?"

"Well, then——"

"The man's sorry. You can lay to that much. Come now—I'm ready for sea. We'll put out. We'll have no trouble nabbin' your man when we gets to Sunshine Tickle. Murder will out. It can't be hid. We'll make short work o' this business. An' the man you takes won't be Elihu Maul."

Constable Charlie looked grave.

"Skipper Toby," said he, "you talk as though you had a notion who the guilty man——"

"I have."

"What is it?"

"I won't tell you."

"You'll tell the magistrate."

"Not me!"

"Don't you know that there's such a thing as contempt of court?"

"I do. I have it."

"I warn you——"

"Out o' the way, sir, please! I'm wantin' to batten things down an' help Elihu with the anchor. We'll be swep' fore an' aft when we gets to sea."

II

THE SAVIOUR OF THE *LADY MAY*

BOUGHT at auction from the underwriters, Pinch-a-Penny Paul Grew's *Lady May* had been raised from the waters of Rooster Bight, where, having been cast away on Ragged Reef in a gale of westerly weather, she had spent a hard winter under the ice. Toot-Toot Toby, Pinch-a-Penny's blacksmith, had dealt with the slime and rust of her; and in the end, after a good deal of queer labor at the forge, he had patched her into power and gained the mastery of her, though he had never, as he said, fallen foul of an engine before. She was forty feet, stem to stern—not an inch more: a snub, broad craft as to hull, suited to the seas she was born to, as the men of the coast were suited. She was noisy, true—there was a vast fuss of wheezing and puffing and tooting when she stirred abroad; but she was able for her labor, withal, notwithstanding the age and makeshifts of her engine and the quality of the coal Pinch-a-Penny Paul Grew had fetched from Sydney. As for fittings, she was stripped to the boards—no upholstery—no folderol

of any sort. Pinch-a-Penny Paul Grew had not kept the *Lady May* for pleasure.

It was harsh weather for small craft beyond the heads of Shout Harbor. Even the mail-boat, diminishing in the drab murk of the way to Round Cove, occasionally vanished altogether in the smash of the sea, smothered in white water. Half a gale of northeast wind, fast spurting up to the pitch of a gale, drove in from the open and tumbled the big seas against the cliffs of the coast. Close in the lee of Long Point, the *Lady May* plodded through a swelling black water, climbing the uneasy crests and slipping head-down into the trough; but drawing away from the mitigating shelter of Long Point, when she nosed into the white of it, then in the swoop and swirl of the gale, she was smothered in the spray of the seas she split. Still, she was able for it. Having survived the first full-grown seas of the open, with Long Point slowing them somewhat, she had nothing left to fear but accident below and that long stretch of larger confusion off Steeple Head, which the coast called the Boiling Pot. With old Elihu Maul at the wheel, Toot-Toot Toby battened in the engine-room and Constable Charlie in the little cabin, with the door shut against shipped water, she labored along toward the shelter of Sunshine Tickle.

Toot-Toot Toby slipped into the cabin for a breath of cool air. He slammed the door against the flying crest of a wave.

"She's doin' well enough," said he.

"Well enough?" Constable Charlie complained. "She's standing on her head most of the time!"

"Jus' prancin' a bit, sir."

The *Lady May* was struck by a sea. It swept her. She hesitated—recovered; then she shook herself free of water and chugged along.

"What say?" Constable Charlie demanded.

"A bit skittish—says I. When she runs into the Boilin' Pot, she'll——"

A second big sea lifted the *Lady May* and flung her down. A third fell on her.

"Look ahead, sir!"

Constable Charlie peered through the dripping little forward port.

"God!" said he.

There was a line of flying white. The *Lady May* was headed for the midst of it. When she hung poised on the crest of a sea, the character of that boiling expanse was revealed. There were reefs. They were shooting spray like geysers.

"Nobbly," Toot-Toot Toby commented.

"She'll never live in that!"

"I'm not so sure, sir. There's passage wide enough. Elihu knows the course in the dark."

"'Twould be better to round it."

"No, sir. She'd not live in the open. I've no coal for it."

"We're *in* the open."

"No, we're in the lee o' Long Point all the way.

If she keeps tight, sir, she'll do well enough. I'm heartened."

"Tight!"

"She's under strain, sir, an' she've been knocked about a deal in her time."

"Put about, man!"

"No, sir."

"She'll founder!"

"Ah, I don't know about that, sir," said Toot-Toot Toby. "Anyhow," he added, with a grim face, rising to return to his post, "she'll not be balked o' tryin' to do her best. When 'tis over, I'll know what she's made of."

Constable Charlie nodded.

"All right," said he.

At best, the *Lady May* was deliberate—a slow, sedate old craft: her determination was more to be praised than her speed. In the sea that was running she crawled. If she did four knots, in the smother between Long Point of Shout Harbor and the first breaking water of the Steeple Head Shallows, she did her utmost. It was coming on dusk, with a glow of western fire flushing the wind-torn fog and a black night creeping up with the wind, when she confronted the passage of the Boiling Pot and began to rear with distaste. In the meantime the wind had jumped to a black gale, drenched with sheets of gray rain from a low, racing sky; and there was more wind behind—crowding up from the open and clamoring on the heels of the

gusts that were blowing. From the cliffs of Steeple Head to the jagged line of the horizon, where the spindrift flew like drifting snow in the wind, the Boiling Pot was seething. In those shallows the seas were heaped up. Scattered Reef was breaking. Old Man and Ding Dong Bell spouted. And the lesser sunken rocks shot the water into the wind—Deep Dick and Snout Rock and the low reefs of the Bone-yard.

A man will not stay below when the ship is in instant peril of foundering. Confinement horrifies him. It is the terror of the trap. Instinctively he seeks the deck and some heartening companionship. On the edge of the Boiling Pot the *Lady May* began to misbehave like a frightened horse. She reared—she plunged. There was a turmoil—the crash and swish of water, the swift, eager cry of the wind. When Constable Charlie felt the first slap and toss of the caldron, he made for the deck on hands and knees, and crawled forward, through a white wash of shipped water, to the wheel-house.

Elihu Maul shouldered the Constable out of the way and bade him hold his tongue or be gone back to his place. Constable Charlie shrank into a corner and braced himself. The window was down a space; spray shot through. Occasionally the *Lady May* dug her nose into the crest of a wave and was smothered overhead. In the intervals, staring through the open slit, Constable Charlie could measure the degree of her peril. The sea had no

regular, dependable motion; it boiled; there were streaming currents, spread with the froth of that agitation—coursing through the reefs. Rocks protruded—high and black and dripping—and were submerged by a new rush of the white flood.

Into the midst of the confusion old Elihu Maul picked a way. Dusk was imminent. Ahead and overhead the sky was black. The fog had blown away. In the west the flare of red had become an expiring glow. Deep night impended. Boy and man, out of Sunshine Tickle, old Elihu Maul, with a hook and line, had fished the Boiling Pot in civil weather from a paddle-punt. There was no rock, no swirling drift of water, in the rush of the sea, that he did not know. The *Lady May* hesitated, uncertain, in the grip of the current of Ding Dong Bell, against which, with his heart in his mouth and his knees shaking, Constable Charlie made sure he would be flung. It was narrow enough; but she struggled into the passage again, no harm done, and staggered toward Snout Rock. The spray of Snout Rock drenched her. She shaved the first reef of the Bone-yard. Always a new passage opened to her. She rolled deep, she pitched—she was tossed like a plaything. White seas ran at her—boarded her, swept her. No matter! With her engine steadily throbbing—a strong steering-way—she would stumble through.

Toot-Toot Toby pounded on the wheel-house door. It was an insistent summons—alarming.

"Let un in," said Elihu Maul.

Toot-Toot Toby crowded in with a shower of spray from Tooth Boulder.

"She's sprung!" said he.

"Dear man!" Elihu laughed.

"God!" gasped Constable Charlie.

"Leakin' like a basket!" Toot-Toot Toby shouted.

"'Tis a naughty trick to play in a place like this," Elihu observed. "Where's she leakin'?"

"Aft. 'Tis streamin' from the bunker."

"Well, well!"

"A flood in the engine-room. 'Tis creepin' after my fires."

"How much more of this?" Constable Charlie demanded.

"What's that we're passin'?" Toot-Toot Toby replied. "Tooth Boulder? We'll be through in forty minutes."

"With a hot fire under the boiler," Elihu qualified.

"If she loses steering-way——"

"She'll strike, ye fool!" Toot-Toot Toby snapped. "Come aft. I wants you to bail."

The *Lady May's* engine was amidships. Aft of the engine-room was the bunker; fuel was loaded through a coal-hole in the after-deck. Constable Charlie followed Toot-Toot Toby. They crawled aft, clinging to the low rail. Now and again a rush of water, boarding when the *Lady May* rolled deep, smashing over the bow when she plunged,

lifted them from the deck. Half the time they were submerged—choked and blinded; and when they came to the engine-room hatchway, though the gaping source of the water below was in plain view, they failed to observe it. Constable Charlie bailed. To eject the water he must open the hatch, waiting for an opportune moment when the *Lady May* was lifted free of the seas. It was slow work; nothing was gained; all the while a little was lost. The water seeped through the engine-room floor and flowed in from the bunker. It rose. Toot-Toot Toby began to bail. Still the water rose. Its rise was even perceptible as it occurred. For greater freedom they left the hatch open a space—chancing the flood of a sudden sea. The rise was not halted. It crept nearer the fire. Forty minutes more—thirty minutes more? No chance! In ten minutes the fires would be wet and dead.

Toot-Toot Toby cried out. He snatched the hatch open and peered aft.

"Cover o' the coal-hole's gone!" he shouted back.

A wave had carried away the cover of the coal-hole. Obviously the round, gaping aperture, open to the sea, was the source of the water. Every wave that swept the *Lady May* poured its measure into the bunker. Toot-Toot Toby leaped out of the engine-room. Constable Charlie followed. He closed the hatch. The *Lady May* was then slipping into a black trough of the Boiling Pot. Her stern was high—momentarily dry of the sea. A

great wave was poised over the bow. It was crested —breaking. The *Lady May* reeled. Her bow began to lift. A moment later she would nose into the sea and be swept. Another deluge threatened the bunker. It would be the end. Toot-Toot Toby was quick to defeat the ultimate catastrophe. He sprang aft. The *Lady May* was then quivering under the shock of the broken sea. A flood was boiling over her. Toot-Toot Toby dropped into the coal-hole to his armpits and closed it with his own body. When the wave had spent itself and the *Lady May* was slipping into another trough, her stern high again, he wiped the water from his eyes and gasped.

"Watch them fires!" he screamed at Constable Charlie.

"I'll get something to plug that hole!"

"There's nothin' aboard. She's bare as a bone. Get below!"

Another wave swept the *Lady May.* Again Toot-Toot Toby expanded his chest in an effort to close the hole. It was sufficient. Once more he emerged, wiping the water from his eyes, and screamed at Constable Charlie to watch the fires. It seemed to Constable Charlie, however, that no man could long survive the deluge and bruising weight of the sea. He searched the *Lady May;* he found nothing—not a blanket, not a cushion, not a shred of canvas or an inch of tarpaulin. The *Lady May* was bare—stripped to her ultimate need

by a miserly man now dead in his grave. Constable Charlie scrambled back to the engine-room and closed the hatch. There was nothing for him to do but keep the life in her, even as old Elihu Maul, at the wheel, held her to her course, oblivious. Constable Charlie marked, now, in unselfish terror, the swift succession of the seas, the thud and deep rush of them—the appalling frequency and weight. From time to time, when the *Lady May* rode the crest of a wave, he looked aft. Toot-Toot Toby was still alive. Presently he was not bothering to wipe the water from his eyes. By and by he seemed to be very tired. In the end his head sagged strangely.

The *Lady May* lurched out of the Boiling Pot, dripping the last sea of her passage, and rounded Lost Anchor into the quiet water of the narrows to Sunshine Tickle. It was then falling deep dusk. Already there were lamps in the kitchens of the place. Presently she was puffing up the harbor in the shelter of the hills, to the late Pinch-a-Penny Paul Grew's wharf. A shrill *toot-toot* of the whistle, repeated like an alarm, warned the folks that the constable had come from St. John's.

Constable Charlie clambered out of the foul little engine-room to discover how Toot-Toot Toby had fared. Toot-Toot Toby was limp and still. Constable Charlie lifted him out of the coal-hole and let him sag to the deck. Then he relieved old Elihu Maul, to stop the engine.

When the *Lady May* swung to the wharf, there was a curious, subdued group in waiting, with lanterns. Elihu Maul and Constable Charlie carried Toot-Toot Toby ashore and laid him on the wharf. The folk fell away. Nobody spoke. They stared at Constable Charlie—stared at the limp body of Toot-Toot Toby. Constable Charlie scowled, in resentment of his callous regard—and Toot-Toot Toby stared at the black sky.

By and by old Abr'am Huff spoke. He was the oldest man at Sunshine Tickle.

"What's the matter with un?" said he.

"He's dead."

"That's good, sir. 'Tis the best thing for he, poor man! Did you have to kill un?"

"Kill him? O' course not. Why should I kill him? A sea must have broken his neck."

"Is you lookin' for the man, sir, that slew Paul Grew?"

"I am."

"You got un."

"This man!"

"We found the bloody bar this mornin', sir, hid away in that man's forge."

" 'Tis not evidence enough——"

"A lad heard the quarrel, sir—seed the man leave Paul Grew's shop."

"Fetch a fish-barrow, some o' you men," said old Elihu Maul, "an' we'll carry the poor man home."

V

THE WRECK OF THE ROUGH-AN'-TUMBLE

I

SKIPPER STEVE'S CRAFT

IT was critically, profoundly plain, just before the tumultuous black-and-white dawn of that day came creeping sluggishly out of the mists of the open sea, that the *Rough-an'-Tumble*—trading the outport harbors between Mother Burke of Cape John and the friendly eye of Cape Norman, and in that interval beating to windward through the windy, wet dark, on the course from Whooping Harbor to Come-Along Cove—it was profoundly plain that the *Rough-an'-Tumble* had more than she could carry. She was obstinate, she was tricky, she was old; she sailed deep, and she made sad labor of it—sullen tempered, in the pitch and slap of the big black seas, blinded by rain and all the while smothered in broken water and spindrifts. When she went over on her beam ends, in a long squall of the wind which pounced on her unaware; when she hung irresolute, with a white swirl risen to her hatches; and while she still lay in the froth as though tired and sullen and outraged and half-minded to make an end of her labor then and there in a fit of temper—then it was manifestly time to humor her disposition.

That was all very well. The *Rough-an'-Tumble*

would not beat up to Come-Along Cove in the wind that was blowing. She was used to having her own way. She must have it now. Skipper Steve —at the wheel, then braced against the slip and sheer slant of the deck and poised over the soapy water, the beat of his heart in suspense—could not recall a time, in the flash of that peril which illuminated the whole wretched course of his connection with the perverse old schooner, when her obedience in an emergency had not amazed him. Hereafter he would humor her; he would never again drive her against her will; he would tease her and coax her and give her her way. And that was all very well: the devil was sick; the devil a monk would be. But still the *Rough-an'-Tumble* lay on her beam ends and was in two minds about righting. A heavier hand on her—a last little push of the squall—would topple her over; and the squall was not blown out—it whistled past, beating and abating, with strength left for mischief.

Presently the schooner righted.

"Ye naughty minx!" Skipper Steve determined. "I'll strip ye!"

Stripped, then, to a rag, the *Rough-an'-Tumble* lay wallowing until dawn.

The *Rough-an'-Tumble* was aged in the service. And she had nothing to learn. She knew about sleet and snow, wind and rain and the dark, breaking seas, reefs and harborless shores, drift-ice and

bergs and fogs; and having for twenty years traded the Newfoundland outports, from small Peter's stores and wharves at Come-Along Cove to the first harbors of Labrador, there was neither harbor, cove, bight, arm, run, basin nor tickle, of that long, harsh coast, that she was not completely aware of —situation, degree of shelter, contour, heads, rocks, fathoms of water. Though she was dressed in new paint every spring of the year, and furnished and furbished until she wore a gaudy, sprightly air of youth, like a decorated grandmother mimicking a lass in apparel, she was old to the bones. Skipper Steve fancied, sometimes, himself fallen into a melancholy mood and out of temper with his ship, that she was tired of it all, as he was tired—driving through the big seas, beating into the big winds, wandering in the fogs, dodging reefs in the dark.

Skipper Steve was not tired now.

"Dang her!" said he to the cook. "She've a notion to go down an' be done with it."

"She have! 'Tis true! An' she will!"

"She'll not! I'll balk her!"

The cook scanned the sea, disclosed in the dirty dawn, and smelled of the rising wind. It was ominous.

"She'll worst ye," he declared.

"Me?"

"Ay, she'll worst ye."

Skipper Steve looked into the cook's eyes, his own twinkling—his face in a quizzical pucker.

"She'll never worst *me!*" said he.

"She will."

"She'll not; she'll do my biddin' to the end of her days."

A Newfoundland crew is a free-and-easy company.

"You're dodderin'," said the cook; "we're cotched already."

"To the end of her days," the skipper repeated grimly, "I'll command her behavior."

Caught? It might be. It was blowing up. And it would blow harder. This was the youth of the gale. It was no place for the old schooner. She must find harbor or founder in the sea that was coming. The wind, running in long squalls and whirling gusts, jumping in from the open to make a lee shore of the coast, had a smart sting in the flung rain of it, and a heavy, gathering slap. Day was broken—a foul, drab day; inshore, where the night lagged, there was black fog not yet blown beyond the dripping cliffs, over the starved timber and into the barrens; and the *Rough-an'-Tumble,* having sped her course by dead reckoning and rule of thumb through the night, might dawdle where she pitched and rolled, under short sail, until the fog lifted above the landmarks. And dawdle she did, impatient for harbor, tossed like a chip with her nose in a smother of white water and her heels in the air; and while she waited for the somber

light to spread, the gale rose to the first malicious blasts of a North Atlantic hurricane.

The first hand came aft.

"We got to get out o' this!" said he.

"What say?"

"Got to get out o' this!" the first hand bawled. "We'll founder afore noon!"

"I 'low," the skipper drawled.

Presently the clerk opened the cabin hatch and put his head in the wind.

"Got to get out o' this!" he shouted.

The skipper nodded.

"Jus' about time," he replied.

"What you doin'?" said the clerk.

"Waitin' for a landmark."

"What say?"

The skipper lifted his voice above the wind and sea and the flap of the canvas.

"Waitin' for a landmark!" he roared. "I can't see the coast. How's the glass?"

"She've kicked the bottom out."

"In for a hurricane."

"Ay. Where you goin'?"

"I'll bear away with the wind when the fog lifts. Jump Tickle will do."

"She'll not make it."

"I'll try the lee o' Thumb-an'-Finger."

It was agreed: Jump Tickle, if she could make it in that weather; and the lee of Thumb-an'-Finger for any port in a storm. The clerk ducked

into the cabin and slammed the doors against the rainy wind; the first hand went forward; the cook lurched into the forecastle to brew a cup of tea and make breakfast; and the skipper, with the wheel gripped, kept a lookout for the first loom of the landmark of Lack-a-Day Head in the lifting mist in the southwest. There was no perturbation aboard the *Rough-an'-Tumble*—neither then nor thereafter in the crisis of the gale and the accumulated misfortunes thereof. A man confronts Death—and bests the Enemy if he can. That's all—and the end of the matter.

Jump Tickle was presently out of the reckoning. It was safe harbor in a northeast gale of wind—the lee of Fortune Head and the Tall Old Man, with an encircling shore; but it was not for the *Rough-an'-Tumble* that day. A break in the fog revealed a glimpse of the gray crest of Lack-a-Day Head for bearings; but the fog closed again before the *Rough-an'-Tumble* had sped half a league of her course; and the coast was perfectly shrouded from incautious approach, so that no skipper, in a mind not wrenched loose by fear, would challenge the reefs of Jump Tickle Cove and the passage to harbor, though the wind was running behind like a pack of gray wolves. Thumb-an'-Finger, then—nothing else for it; a niggardly lee at best, and rough anchorage in northeasterly weather, with the sea rolling in from the open. And for Thumb-an'-Finger, with the gale whipping up behind, and the

schooner raising a white dust, Skipper Steve steered a course, the *Rough-an'-Tumble* complaining like a driven beast.

She made it. Down went the big bow anchor. The schooner swung with the wind. The cook came aft.

"Well, sir," said he to the skipper, "you done it, didn't you?"

"Anchor's down, Cook."

"An' you're ridin' easy, isn't you?"

"None too easy."

"No, none too easy. An' what will you do if the wind switches a few points to the east?"

"Hang on."

"An' if it blows higher?"

"Hang on."

"She'll rip her nose out."

"Ah, well, Cook," said the skipper, "she done what I told her to. Here we is, isn't we?—here in the lee o' Thumb-an'-Finger where I said I'd fetch her. An' here we'll bide."

"I've no doubt about that," said the cook.

The skipper started.

"What you croaking about?" he demanded.

"True enough," the cook replied; "we'll bide here."

"Ay, we'll bide here."

The cook laughed.

"I'll command her behavior," said the skipper tartly. "Mark me, Cook! She'll do what I tells her

when I tells her to do it." And mildly: "Is you got a cup o' tea in the fo'c's'le?"

"I is, sir. I come aft for you."

It was warm in the little forecastle. In the wind that was blowing, no harm could come to the *Rough-an'-Tumble.* She tugged at her chain, as the big seas slipped beneath and ran on to their catastrophe against the cliffs; but she was berthed snug for the time, and in the keeping of the watch on deck. It was cosy below. It was a familiar place. Skipper Steve shifted his soggy clothes, sipped his tea, nibbled his biscuit; and having planned definitely, cunningly, for the last emergency, in the horrible event of it, he dismissed his concern and took his ease. And the wind rose, and the seas rolled in upon the cliffs, and the frothy rocks below the cliffs, tossing the old schooner, tugging at her, in their swift, eager rush; and the hands and the clerk yarned and laughed together, as though the *Rough-an'-Tumble* lay in the shelter of some placid harbor; and the pessimistic cook, according to his doleful custom, hummed a new ballad of the coast, made by little Toby Farr, of Ha-ha Harbor, and enjoying a run of popularity, that season, from Twillingate Long Point to Cape Chidley:

"Oh, the chain he parted,
An' the schooner drove ashore;
An' the wives of the hands
Never seed un no more—
No more—
Never seed un no mor-or-ore!"

II

BETWEEN THUMB AND FINGER

AS a matter of fact, the situation of the *Rough-an'-Tumble* was desperately precarious. And there was no illusion in the forecastle. It was blowing a memorable hurricane from the northeast. There were no spare anchors aboard. In a shift of that wind to the south of east, the schooner would part her chain or drag her anchor. Caught midway of the Harborless Shore, however, she was berthed to the best advantage. Whatever the dose, it must be swallowed at Thumb-an'-Finger. And Thumb-an'-Finger was no harbor in southeasterly weather. It was no better than a wide, deep cove, rimmed with cliffs, there sheer and high, here low and shaggy with spruce; and the seas, rolling in from the troubled open beyond. The Thumb and The Finger, which were the heads of the cove, ran a free course, spray driving ahead with the wind, and went to smash on the rocks. The place was a trap. It had been cleverly named by the old navigator, whoever he was, whom misfortune had first

apprised of its malicious danger. In high south-easterly weather there was no beating to sea. And The Thumb and The Finger closed on the craft between.

"I fished here as a lad," the skipper observed.

"Poor berth!" said the first hand.

"Ay; we used to put to sea like mad, when a big wind threatened, an' run down to Jump Tickle for harbor."

"No sense in puttin' to sea now," said the cook.

The skipper yawned.

"No," said he; "we'd founder out there."

"You ever hang on here afore?"

"Never so unlucky," the skipper replied. "But I knows this place like a book. 'Tis deep water up to the cliffs. An' the cliffs is high an' nigh sheer. Yet there's a way above for monkeys. 'Tis not a high climb. One sort o' cleft, I mind—we used t' land there an' clamber up for blueberries an' hertz an' bake-apples. There's no sunken rocks in the cove to matter. The water's free. An' there's not much shingle. The sea goes slap ag'in' the cliff or breaks on the broken rock below. I knows the shore well. My brother an' me, lads then, used to hook lobsters alongshore. 'Tis a nasty place in there. The seas jus' go *thump* on the rocks an' explode. The spray's like smoke. I never seed anywhere else the water so noisy an' smashed. 'Tis churned to milk an' froth."

"Good holdin'?"

"Well," said the skipper, "not so wonderful good."

"She'll drag," said the cook promptly.

Again the skipper yawned.

"If she does," said he, "I knows what t' do."

"Isn't nothin' to do," the cook protested.

And once more the skipper yawned.

"We're in a tight place," said he. "We'll make the best of a bad job."

The crew was aware of peril—not troubled. Yet the men were not callous. Nobody could regard an adventure in the breakers of Thumb-an'-Finger with indifference. As the gale rose, blowing over The Thumb and falling with a heavier hand on the straining *Rough-an'-Tumble,* and as day drew on, with the wind threatening change in gusts from a new direction suspiciously inclined to the south of east, there was an occasional humorous reference to the adamantine quality of the Thumb-an'-Finger rock. It was not bravado. It was a decent merriment. And this was a crew of decent men—a crew of five,—making six, with the clerk, —all hailing from the same harbor, all bred together, all friendly together; Skipper Steve, Long John Tiller, Sandy Brace, young Jimmie Temple, Billy Cuff—who was the cook—and Pitts, the clerk. Long John Tiller had a new wife, and Billy Cuff had a new baby, and the clerk was plighted to a maid of Ha-ha Harbor, and young Jimmie Temple was suspected of an amorous in-

terest in Skipper Steve's pretty daughter, which his blushes confessed. Life tasted good to them all. Nobody wanted to be cast away on Thumb-an' Finger. It was an objectionable possibility.

"Wind's switchin'," said the cook. He had just come down the ladder.

Skipper Steve and the clerk went on deck.

"We-l-l," the skipper admitted, when they returned, "she've more east in her."

"Dashed with east," the clerk added.

The cooked laughed scornfully.

"Dashed with east, is it?" said he. "That she is! She's *soused* with it. An' she've the flavor o' south, too!"

"Ah, well!" said the skipper.

"Who made that chain?" the cook demanded.

"What chain?" inquired the skipper.

"That anchor-chain."

"I knows all about that chain."

"Who forged it?"

"That anchor-chain?" the skipper replied. "Sam Gray made that anchor-chain. I watched un forge it when the *Rough-an'-Tumble* was buildin' at Come-Along Cove. I mind I was gettin' over the measles, at the time, an' had nothin' to do but sit around Small Peter's blacksmith shop. Twenty year ago, that was—thereabouts. An' Sam Gray was Small Peter's smithy. I watched un forge that chain, link after link, day by day; an' I mind I wondered how it would all turn out in the end—

whether she'd snap or not in the pinch. An' I said to Sam: 'Lives o' men will hang on that chain one o' these days.' An' Sam rested his hammer on a red-hot link, an' he looked up an' laughed. An' he said: 'Was you thinkin' t' tell me something I didn't know?' An' I 'low that chain won't snap," the skipper concluded,—"if any chain, forged by the hand o' man, in the good faith o' God, would hold in a gale like this, if it swings full to the sou'east."

"Anybody ever hear o' one o' Sam Gray's chains snappin'?" inquired the cook.

Nobody had.

"Somebody will," the cook maintained significantly, "if this wind changes."

And the wind changed. Late in the afternoon, it swung to the southeast, unabated, and drove in upon the rocks of Thumb-an'-Finger. It was a tempest. Sam Gray's chain, forged in the fear o' God, held its own; but the *Rough-an'-Tumble,* tossing in the greater seas, with the wind behind, began to drag. And that was the end of security—the end of speculation. Skipper Steve called the crew on deck. There was no commotion. The crew stood by for orders. For a little while the men waited expectant. The anchor might grip the bottom again; the slow, inevitable, accelerating drift of the schooner might be arrested. And the anchor caught, held its ground, and the drift of the schooner was arrested with a jerk. It was for an interval

of seconds. The seas tugged, and the big wind pushed, and the *Rough-an'-Tumble* shook her head like a leashed dog; and in the grasp of the third sea, which then slipped away to spend itself in thunder and froth, the schooner began to drag again, now in swift advances and little pauses. Her end was very near.

The clerk broke the suspense.

"We got to get out o' *this!*" he gasped.

"Out of it!" the cook scoffed. He had gone white. "How we goin' to get out of it?"

"She's gone!" said the first hand.

"She is," the skipper agreed. "'Tis the end of her."

"Out of it?" the cook repeated, scowling at the clerk. "How?"

"There's more ways than one o' killin' a cat, Cook," said the skipper. "An' if the ol' girl does what I tells her to do——"

"You better tell her quick!" the cook snapped.

"I will, Cook!"

It was dusk. The light was half gone. In that thick weather, with rain in the wind, night would fall black. And night would fall soon. While Skipper Steve went forward to survey the line of cliffs in the dusk, the men stripped themselves to the waist. They kicked off their shoes—whatever might encumber them in the water. There was no panic. They were afraid—true! But they were not bewildered. It was a familiar situation. Many

a schooner had been wrecked on a lee shore before the *Rough-an'-Tumble* put one foot in her grave at Thumb-an'-Finger. These men were used to dealing with the various perils of the winds, the rocks, the seas, the fogs of that coast. And they were, therefore, self-possessed and competent. A group of landsmen would have been unnerved—helpless and foolish with fear. These six Newfoundlanders were not incredibly heroic; they were merely in a commonplace predicament, peril familiarly imminent, known to them since childhood; and they were, therefore, in complete command of their faculties, nerved and cool and eager for action.

The cove of Thumb-an'-Finger was horribly noisy. And it was fast darkening. A shrieking wind blowing in long gusts, a breaking sea hissing past, the sharp patter and drumming of the rain, the creak and rattle of the rigging and the swish and thunder of the breakers in a semicircle of high cliffs beyond, redoubling, as in a shallow cavern: it was a frightful confusion. And what lay in store for the *Rough-an'-Tumble* was still visible in the dusk. The cliffs were a solid black; there was a high, rolling sky-line, a black line against the leaden clouds of the storm, now catching the last of the light; and from The Thumb to The Finger, in the half-moon of the trap, the sea was breaking furiously. Great black seas, at this, the maximum of the gale, went ponderously past the schooner,

their crests snatched off by the wind, and piled themselves in white heaps of water against the feet of the cliffs; and at that point toward which the schooner was drifting on a straight line with the gale, the cliffs were sheer, with gigantic masses of rock, fallen from above, buried in the foam.

Skipper Steve came amidships.

"I've picked the spot," said he. "Pass me an ax, one o' you."

Jimmie Temple got the skipper an ax. The skipper was in haste. He gashed the foremast—gashed the mainmast deep.

"What's this?" said the cook.

"Two o' you stand by to let the anchor-chain run out!" the skipper returned. This was in a great bawl. Yet the skipper was placid. It was a definite command. In the crisis of a Newfoundland wreck, according to the traditions, it is every man for himself. The time had not yet come. The crew attended. The skipper went on: "Jimmie, let me have a rag o' the jib when I gives you the word. I wants steerin' way—no more. Sandy, stand by to give Jimmie a hand. I'll beach her. There's a cleft in there. 'Tis low. Deep water runs in. I'll stick her nose in there. There's room for the bow. She'll strike hard. When you're ready, take to the masts. They'll fall over the port bow. The cliff's low at that point. You'll find spruce growin' there. Get into the trees. An' be smart. She won't last long. I give her but three thumps.

'Twill finish her. She'll break her back an' go to splinters. Cling fast when she strikes—then into the spruce afore she strikes again. The masts will fall below when she breaks up. If you're cotched by a breaker, you'll be swep' into Hole-in-the-Wall an' smashed to pulp. For'ard, now, you men—the chain an' the jib-sheet! Cook, up the mainmast! Sharp!"

Jimmie Temple, who was in lad's-love with the skipper's pretty daughter, protested.

"What's to become o' you, sir?"

Skipper Steve turned in astounded wrath.

"Y-y-you h-hear me?" he stuttered.

"She'll be swep' fore-an'-aft when she strikes."

"For'ard, you!"

Jimmie Temple ducked the skipper's slow fist and ran forward. In the bow, standing by to slip the anchor, were Sandy Brace and Long John Tiller; and at the jib-sheet—Pitts, the clerk. As for the cook, he stood fast, amidships, sullen as an offended boy; he would take no advantage. And Skipper Steve laughed, and shouted "Good boy, Cook!" before he sprang aft to the wheel. A moment later the anchor-chain clattered out, the jib flapped in the wind—and the *Rough-an'-Tumble* was adrift, stern on; and Tiller, Brace, Cuff, Pitts and Jimmie Temple were scrambling up the mainmast shrouds. The schooner hung—then fell away. And round she did; and she gathered way, answered her helm, drove into the gloom, wherein Skipper Steve's prac-

ticed eye and awakened memory could descry the saving cleft in the cliff. And as she ran to her death, Skipper Steve wondered how long she would live in the breakers, and how soon, when she had struck, the following sea would break over her stern and sweep her clean, in a whirling, white, clinging deluge.

And then she was in the current of the first breaking wave.

Skipper Steve quit the wheel and leaped for the mainmast shrouds. The breaker dropped the *Rough-an'-Tumble.* Her nose was in the cleft. The masts snapped and fell against the cliff. The following sea slipped beneath, lifted the schooner, hung poised and black above her taffrail, came smashing down and rushed the length of her. Above, Sandy Brace and the clerk were in the scrub spruce, with hands out for Long John Tiller and the cook, who were hauled ashore before the third sea fell. Jimmie Temple waited in the rigging, peering into the wreck and the moving white gloom below; the fourth sea was beginning to lift the schooner high, —the third had spent itself over the bow,—when the skipper came laboring up the shrouds, dripping the spray of the last wave, racing to escape the clutch of the next one. Jimmie Temple clambered into the spruce. Skipper Steve gained the cross-trees. The schooner dropped on the rocks and broke her back. She began to fall to pieces. The mast sagged. Skipper Steve caught Jimmie Temple's

hand, grasped a branch and made good his footing ashore as the mainmast vanished in the depths.

There was a pause.

"Thanks, Jimmie," said Skipper Steve. Then: "I'll tell Sally about this."

And Jimmie Temple blushed.

"Thank you, sir!" said he. "Aw, I wouldn't tell Sally!"

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